

THE IMPRINT OF THE PRESS: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE
INFLUENCE OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN PRINT
ON MORMONISM IN KIRTLAND, OHIO, 1831-1837

by

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ABSTRACT

This cultural history of Mormonism in Kirtland, Ohio, from 1831 to 1837 uses Agenda Setting and Vilification Theories to analyze 1,617 articles from 325 newspapers published during those years. This unprecedented number of sources enabled the researcher to identify how nineteenth-century print culture and texts about and by the Mormons created, shaped, changed, and directed the trajectory of Mormonism in its formative years.

The qualitative examination exposed the most recurring topics on Mormonism in papers across the country, including the phenomenon of editors' specific efforts to create a cultural enemy of Joseph Smith; the editorial tone used while writing about such news; the number of times identical or similar texts were reprinted in the newspaper exchange; and the dispersion and geographical reach of readers throughout the United States. It was discovered that American editors regularly employed six agendas when printing about the Mormons: dishonesty; criminality; fanaticism; credulity and gullibility; power; and vilification. Mormon reactions in their newspapers demonstrated a hypersensitivity to what was printed about them and revealed efforts to sway public perception with four of their own agendas: to dispel, correct, or offset incorrect perceptions; relay church doctrines and structure; unify scattered members; and portray a persecuted people. The focus on early years of the American entity that would become known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints fills gaps in existing studies in American, religious, print, Mormon, and communication/journalism histories.

Mormonism was a consistent topic in the American press during the seven years of this study. Newspapers in each state and territory addressed it on average every 1.5 days. Antebellum editors were unhindered by current First Amendment free press precedents and their viewpoints, opinions, and agenda-setting rhetoric were perpetuated in the minds of a voracious reading public as attitudes and understandings about Mormons were published, copied, and republished. The uniqueness and value of the research is the discovery and analysis of what was portrayed as truth about an American religion in thousands of printed pages and the reactions the texts evoked. Evidence of present-day agenda setting also is discussed in relation to the Mormons.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*The Press—The greatest preacher of righteousness
in the world; makes it thousands of proselytes
where man can make but one.
Brigham Young¹*

Introduction

Breakfast had long since grown cold by the time Joseph Smith's friend and benefactor, Martin Harris, trudged up the path to the Smith family home in Manchester, New York, in June 1828. He was more than four hours late. The agony intensified when he stalled and sat for some time on the rail fence along the road with his hat pulled down deep over his eyes. Harris eventually entered the home and somberly joined the others at the table. Only a moment after taking up his knife and fork to begin eating, he suddenly dropped them and, in the depths of anguish, cried out, "Oh, I have lost my soul! I have lost my soul!" Smith, no longer able to contain his own brooding fears, sprang from his place at the table and exclaimed, "Martin, have you lost that manuscript? Have you broken your oath, and brought down condemnation upon my head, as well as your own?" Harris confessed, "Yes, it is gone, and I know not where." Smith then clenched his hands

¹ "Printers' Festival – Regular Toasts," *Deseret News*, March 6, 1852; see also Barbara L. Cloud, *The Coming of the Frontier Press: How the West Was Really Won* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 23.

and lamented, “Oh, my God! All is lost! All is lost! What shall I do? I have sinned [and] tempted the wrath of God.”²

The manuscript was the only copy of the first 116 handwritten pages of Smith’s translation of the miraculous, if not mysterious, Gold Plates, which, when published, was the Book of Mormon.³ This work that had been “so fondly anticipated, and which had been the source of so much secret gratification” to the Smith family seemed to have “fled for ever.”⁴ Only weeks earlier, Harris pressed Smith to appeal to the Lord to allow him to use the pages as evidence to his wife and others that his devotion, time, and financing of Smith’s angelically motivated secret was yielding tangible fruit.⁵ With much hesitation, Smith required the rejoicing Harris to bind himself in a “most solemn manner” with a covenant to protect the pages and show them to only five predetermined persons, his wife

² Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, And His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 121.

³ Joseph Smith claimed to receive an ancient record engraved on a bound volume of gold plates from an angel on September 22, 1827. Along with the plates, Smith was also provided an instrument he called a “Urim and Thummim” that allowed him to translate the text. Joseph Smith Jr., “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842, 707. The record was published as the Book of Mormon in 1830. Smith and his followers accepted the book as new scripture comparable to the Bible. Thus, the book and the plates were often referred to by outsiders as the “Gold Bible.” Whereas the Book of Mormon was considered scripture by Joseph Smith and members of his faith to the current day, the title “Book of Mormon” is not italicized through the dissertation as with other literary works but will be treated stylistically as the titles of scriptural works such as the Bible.

⁴ Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, And His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 122; spelling in original.

⁵ Smith and Harris experienced two divine responses of “No” to the petition in the foregoing process. Unsatisfied, Harris pled with Smith to pray about it a third time to which a conditional “Yes” was received. See Smith, 117.

being one.⁶ Harris gratefully accepted the obligation and departed Pennsylvania for New York with what he supposed to be the marriage- and reputation-saving treasure.⁷ Shortly thereafter, Smith's wife, Emma, nearly died in childbirth, along with their firstborn son. Smith's preoccupation with his wife's well-being only forestalled his lurking dread, and Harris's belated visit to breakfast carried with it the impending doom. During his absence, Harris broke his covenant and showed the manuscript to a number of interested parties. On the morning Smith called for him, Harris went to retrieve the document from his bureau and discovered it was missing.⁸

This soul-wrenching experience of Joseph Smith Jr., Mormonism's founder, was his introductory lesson to the culture, power, and influence of the nineteenth-century American press.⁹ The twenty-three-year-old Smith soon received a revelation wherein the Lord revealed¹⁰ that enemies absconded with the text to use the clout of the press to

⁶ Harris was restricted to showing the manuscript to his wife, brother, parents, and wife's sister.

⁷ Joseph Smith and his wife, Emma Hale Smith, had moved from Smith's parents' home outside of Palmyra, New York, to a residence near her parents in Harmony, Pennsylvania, in an effort to escape the "multitudes [that] were on the alert continually to get [the gold plates] from me if possible." Joseph Smith, "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, May 2, 1842, 772. Smith and Harris completed the first 116 pages of translation in relative security in Pennsylvania when Harris asked permission to return to his wife in New York with the manuscript.

⁸ See Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, And His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 122–23; Steven C. Harper, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City, UT: Mormon Channel, April 28, 2009), <http://www.mormonchannel.org/joseph-smith-papers-season-1/3>.

⁹ Reference to "the press" in communication and journalism history refers more specifically to newspapers and is used as such in this study. Specific identification of the format of other notable printed material (e.g., books, pamphlets, ads, etc.) will be duly made.

¹⁰ Since this dissertation examines the influence of the press on the rise of

discredit the somewhat infamous Smith and his heavenly claims. The godly tutorial read:

And, behold, satan has put it into their hearts to alter the words which you have caused to be written, or which you have translated, which have gone out of your hands; and behold ... [they have thought] if God giveth him power [to] translate again, or ... if he bringeth forth the same words, behold we have the same with us, and we have altered them: Therefore, they will not agree, and we will say that he has lied in his words, and that he has no gift, and that he has no power: therefore, we will destroy him, and also the work ... and behold they would publish this, and satan would harden the hearts of the people, to stir them up to anger against you, that they might not believe my words: thus satan would overpower your testimony in this generation, that the work might not come forth in this generation.¹¹

The extent of the damage that might have been inflicted on this new book of scripture and its resulting religion if the unknown enemies had published such manufactured discrepancies would have been disastrous to the fledgling faith.

Smith's concern for the reality of the plot is evident in his preface to the first

Mormonism in its formative years as opposed to the veracity or validity of Smith's theological claims, it would become wearisome to condition each of Smith's statements, revelations, or visions with disclaimers such as *allegedly*, *purportedly*, or *supposedly*. Mormons unabashedly use phrases such as, "The Lord revealed to Joseph," while others of different religious or academic backgrounds are more likely to use a more generic sociology- or psychology-driven statement such as, "Smith imagined or claimed...." Whether Joseph Smith actually saw his visions or received his revelations from a divine source is not the issue in this study. The fact that Smith believed the origin of his prophecies was godly and *put them into print* to be audaciously carried to a worldwide audience is of far greater interest. Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation, the phraseology Smith used himself, such as "Thus saith the Lord," will be mirrored. One advantage of so doing is that the reader will be better enabled to understand why the transcription of Smith's channeling attains such a sacred importance in Mormonism—it came directly from a personal God. Great numbers of Mormons hazarded their lives for the printed word by and about Mormons, regardless of incongruities or how a reader might feel about the source of their beliefs. Other scholars have been "vexed" with this same "rhetorical problem" when addressing religious revisionists and have handled it in similar ways. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), xxi–xxii; Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 14–15.

¹¹ *Book of Commandments* (Independence, MO: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833), chap. IX:2-3, 7 (pp. 23-24).

edition of the Book of Mormon. Smith briefly recounted the existence of “many false reports” circulating regarding the Book of Mormon and the “many unlawful measures taken by evil designing persons to destroy me and also the work.” He then detailed the Lord’s instruction not to republish what was secretly altered, thereby “confound[ing] those who have altered my words” and showing to the world that “my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil.”¹² Smith learned a poignant lesson regarding the power of the press to sway the public mind and bore the weight of the new understanding throughout his life.

Purpose and Research Questions

This and additional collisions with nineteenth-century print culture placed the power of the press in a constant and nagging position in Smith’s mind as he endeavored to introduce new scripture and a new religion to the world. Mormon history events have been cited and applied by scholars and historians in multiple spheres of research; nevertheless, such studies were constrained by the limited number of extant newspaper articles on Mormonism.¹³ Tens of thousands of pages of newspapers recently digitized by governmental, academic, and for-profit databases remain unexplored and contain evidences to solidify and expand what has only been surmised from well-worn articles

¹² *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, NY: E. B. Grandin, 1830), Preface.

¹³ There is some noteworthy preliminary work that focuses on Mormonism in newspapers. See, for example, David J. Whittaker, “The Web of Print: Toward a History of the Book in Early Mormon Culture,” *Journal of Mormon History* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 1–41; Donald Q. Cannon, “In the Press: Early Newspaper Reports on the Initial Publication of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 4–15; LeGrand Baker, *Murder of the Mormon Prophet: The Political Prelude to the Death of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2006). However, these scholars still faced severe limitations of small newspaper collections.

previously located and used by scholars and historians. Moreover, newspapers in scholarly works on Mormonism are relegated to a supporting role for various theses as opposed to being the focus of study. Recognizing this gap, the author began a two-year, painstaking discovery and collection of approximately eleven thousand new articles from which the sources of this dissertation were drawn. This rich, unparalleled repository provided a measurable amount of newspaper artifacts to identify the continual and penetrating thread of how agenda-setting and vilification in American print culture created and shaped the American perception of Mormonism thereby consistently affecting the early trajectory of Mormonism.¹⁴

Mormonism has a vivid, albeit frequently controversial, and voluminously documented history.¹⁵ While this dissertation is not a traditional history of the Mormons,

¹⁴ Smith's church was known by the names of the Church of Christ and the Church of the Latter Day Saints during the time frame of this study. In 1838, it was changed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its title being given to Joseph Smith in a revelation. The nickname "Mormon" was taken from the title of the Book of Mormon by opponents and was used as a derogatory epithet. The term "Mormon Church" has a long history of publication; however, it is not an authorized title and the Church discourages its use. The Church publishes a Style Guide for authors and media personnel wherein the full name of the Church is given preference over abbreviations. When a shortened reference is needed, writers are encouraged to use "the Church" or "the Church of Jesus Christ." Members are preferably referred to as "Latter-day Saints" though referring to members as "Mormons" is acceptable. The term "Mormonism" is acceptable for describing the unique culture, doctrine, and lifestyle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This dissertation references the Church and its members according to the Style Guide. "Style Guide - The Name of the Church - LDS Newsroom," accessed August 16, 2017, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/style-guide>.

¹⁵ Mormons consider themselves to be under divine direction to be a record-keeping people. See *Book of Commandments*, chap. XXII:1 (p. 35). They were further commanded by a revelation through Joseph Smith in 1842 to "let all the records be had in order, that they may be put in the archives of my Holy Temple, to be held in remembrance from generation to generation, saith the Lord of Hosts." Joseph Smith, "Tidings," *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1842, 919–20.

some background information is necessary to contextualize the Kirtland, Ohio, seven-year segment from 1831 to 1837 (inclusive) selected for this study. The challenges of summarizing fifteen years of the birth and growth of a new religion from six members in New York in 1830 to over twelve thousand in Illinois in the mid-1840s and five states in the process are obvious. Nevertheless, an overview will be helpful to those unfamiliar with the early Mormon trail.

Mormonism began in New York in the 1820s with angelic visitations to a teenaged Joseph Smith Jr. of a farming family who, until then, were of no real consequence.¹⁶ Smith was divinely directed to an ancient record engraved on gold plates hidden in a hillside and was commanded to translate them. The translation was accomplished in New York and Pennsylvania as Smith endeavored to protect the infamous gold from marauders. The resulting book of scripture comparable to the Bible was published in Palmyra, New York, in the spring of 1830 as the Book of Mormon. Smith, guided by new heavenly revelations, organized believers into a church that migrated into the wilds of the Ohio in 1831. Mormonism grew for the seven years they inhabited Kirtland, Ohio, despite mobbing and apostasy.

¹⁶ Renowned scholars have written hundreds of books and articles on Mormon history. It would be impractical to cite even a small percentage of them for the summary found in the next two pages. Nevertheless, recent recognized works include Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007; Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Thomas M. Spencer, ed., *The Missouri Mormon Experience* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2010); Karl Ricks Anderson, *Joseph Smith's Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1996); Roger D. Launius and John E. Hallwas, eds., *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996). More specific references on these historical events are found throughout the dissertation and are listed in the bibliography.

A branch of Smith's followers was assigned to establish in Jackson County, Missouri, the city Zion, a community of one heart and mind to which Jesus Christ would return to inaugurate the Millennium. Instead, Missourians and Mormons clashed. In 1833 the former drove the latter from their homes having destroyed the Mormon printing office and tarring and feathering some and mobbing many. Smith's efforts to restore them to their lands or obtain redress from the local, state, and federal governments failed.

Kirtland, on the other hand, swelled with converts who built a temple, reestablished their printing efforts, and began a banking enterprise, which ended in catastrophic failure in 1837. Internal dissension and increased external threats caused Smith and his Kirtland community numbering approximately two thousand to abandon Ohio in 1838. They fled to the prospects of their own town and county in the mostly uninhabited prairies of Far West, Missouri. The Mormon population exploded to some five thousand as relations with Missourians again deteriorated. Violence escalated quickly and both Mormons and Missourians lay dead. Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum, and other leading Mormons were imprisoned through the winter while the Mormon body was driven from the state in 1839 under gubernatorial sanction.

Relative peace dawned in the spring of 1840 for the escaped Smith brothers as the Mormons again gathered, this time in an Illinois swamp along the Mississippi River. It was renamed Nauvoo, indicating a beautiful place of safety. The swamp was drained, new newspapers were established, converts from England streamed across the ocean, another temple was begun, and Mormon membership exceeded ten thousand. By 1844, old Missouri enemies reappeared, local outsiders grew jealous and fearful of Smith's consolidated power, and formidable apostates preached their rhetoric in the press. In June

1844, Joseph and Hyrum Smith were murdered while in jail confined on charges stemming from destroying an apostate press. The thirty-eight-year-old founder of Mormonism met his death in the barbaric tradition of nineteenth-century American lynching. His notably contested successor, Brigham Young, led the Mormons across the plains to the Great Salt Lake Valley, Utah Territory, and further into the annals of American history.

There are countless references to, and substantive use of, various Mormon and non-Mormon newspapers in Mormon history research; however, the identifications characteristically serve merely to emphasize other points and conclusions.¹⁷ One critical gap in Mormon scholarship is that there has not yet been a study that uses the larger idea of the press as the vehicle to study the influence of nineteenth-century American print on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints along its trail of settlements and expulsions during the lifetime of its founder, Joseph Smith. This dissertation is the first to do so, focusing on the seven-year Kirtland era. It does so with a qualitative study of more than 1,600 texts printed about and by the Mormons, which exposed six agendas used by American editors and four agendas of the Mormons as discovered in the most frequently published topics, their editorial tone, the number of times they were reprinted in the newspaper exchange, the dispersion and geographical reach of readers in the United

¹⁷ For example, a certain Abner Cole, writing under the pseudonym Obadiah Dogberry, has become infamous in Mormon lore for his unauthorized printing of extracts from the Book of Mormon. The portions of his Palmyra, New York, *Reflector* most frequently (and nearly exclusively) cited are those containing or criticizing the “Gold Bible” or its translator, Joseph Smith. Only recently have researchers examined Cole in a different, broader light—namely, the Freethought Movement extant in the United States from about 1825-1850. See Kimberley Mangun and Jeremy J. Chatelain, “For ‘The Cause of Civil and Religious Liberty’: Abner Cole and the Palmyra, New York, Reflector,” *American Journalism* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 184–205.

States, and the Mormon reaction in their own newspapers.

Nineteenth-century newspaper editors exchanged their papers with each other with little or no cost through the United States postal service courtesy of the Post Office Act of 1792. This system allowed national news to be disseminated throughout the new Republic and for noteworthy local news to spread beyond its hometown origin. At a time when the early United States was less than united, the intent was to increase nationalism through the spread of unifying news.¹⁸ The nearly twenty-nine thousand antebellum newspapers recorded by the Library of Congress provide an invaluable resource for a rich view of nearly limitless topics printed and consumed by Americans.¹⁹ This dissertation, a cultural history drawn from 325 newspapers that printed about Mormonism during its Kirtland, Ohio, years from 1831 to 1837, recovers the “past forms of imagination, of historical consciousness, [the] ‘structure of feeling’ [that] combined into a way of thinking and living” for Americans, specifically regarding the burgeoning Mormon movement.²⁰

The Yale University Department of History explains that “*cultural history* brings to life a past time and place” through “objects and experiences of everyday life.... In this

¹⁸ See Richard A. Schwarzlose, *The Nation's Newsbrokers*, vol. 1 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989).

¹⁹ *Chronicling America*, the online repository of Historic American Newspapers sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress, lists 957 known newspapers for Ohio in the decade of the 1830s of which five were printed in Geauga County, in which Kirtland was located. Mormonism was a national conversation and the 325 newspapers cited in this dissertation include varying numbers from Ohio (detailed in succeeding chapters) but are drawn from across the country.

²⁰ James W. Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 25.

sense, our instincts, thoughts, and acts have an ancestry which cultural history can illuminate and examine critically.” The proverbial journey, “thrilling in itself,” is “an effort to inhabit the minds of the people of different worlds.” Cultural context is often invisible to those who live within it. One value of a cultural history is that it “inspires us to think how our own cultures and societies can evolve” and to consider what forces shape that process. Studying these aspects enables historians to explore the “many understandings of our varied presents.”²¹

For the cultural history of this dissertation, nineteenth-century print on Mormonism was selected as the venue of the “everyday attitudes, values, assumptions and prejudices” as understood in the minds of the populace. More important to a cultural history than whether what was printed was true is what was portrayed as truth according to the agendas of newspaper owners and editors and the degree to which it was accepted as truth by voracious subscribers. Thus, identifying and probing what nineteenth-century editors produced for Americans to read in the press on a specific subject, time, and place, allows a peculiar vision of “how action made sense from the standpoint of historical actors” and how it felt “to live and act in a particular period of human history.”²²

Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to write a cultural history that examined the following research questions in a delimited era of Mormon history:

How did print culture and printed texts about and by the Mormons create, shape, change, and direct the trajectory of Mormonism in its Ohio years?

What does early Mormon history teach us about the atmosphere of print culture in

²¹ “Cultural History,” Yale University Department of History, paras. 1–2, accessed December 2, 2017, <https://history.yale.edu/academics/undergraduate-program/regions-and-pathways/cultural-history>; italics added.

²² Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” 2011, 25.

nineteenth-century America?

Pursuing these questions revealed the larger national and social context surrounding American print culture and the nature of the use of freedom of the press into which Mormonism was born and matured. This deepened cultural view of the role the printed word played in the lives and societies of Americans helps infuse the scholarship of Mormon and other histories with an aspect of communication history presently missing in multiple academic fields.

Significance

The first significance of this study is found in its interdisciplinary approach—examining a topic with important facets in five historical fields: American, religious, print, Mormon, and communication/journalism histories. The needs and value of this dissertation to those fields are combined and summarized as follows.

Communication, Journalism and Print Histories' Significance

The early republic in which Mormonism developed witnessed an explosion in the technology, availability, and consumption of printed texts in the 1800s. Expanding on the achievements of earlier Colonial and Revolutionary printers,

The 19th century remains the cradle of modern communication in America when journalism became the single most important conversation in society, building on the spread of literacy, technological advancements, and the potential of large numbers of readers across the country.²³

Thus, the “Patriarchs of the [printing] Craft—Fathers of the Press” at the Western New York Printers’ Festival in Rochester, New York, in 1847 proved prescient in their lavish

²³ Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, eds., *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 143.

celebration:

The “PRESS” and a “PRINTER!” Who is not proud to be associated with the one, and classed with the other? Never has the genius of man been able to offer to the world, viewed in all its parts, any thing [*sic*] that at all compares with that of the *Press*. Its capacity for good or evil is unbounded. As an engine of moral and political power it has no equal—it is the grand regulator of the world, and its power is alike felt and acknowledged, as well by the prince on the throne, as by the dweller in the hamlet. It is the lever by which the great operations of the world, political, moral, and social, are moved. How vastly important, then that this power is not misplaced.²⁴

Journalism historians have examined such claims, and volumes too numerous to note have been written on the influence of the press in America.²⁵

However, the research of printing in America is not exhaustive. Despite impressive scholarly achievements, significant gaps still exist and communication historians continue striving for greater accreditation in academia.²⁶ Print and journalism historians, nonetheless, recognize the irresistible fact that journalism history “is

²⁴ Frederick Follett, *History of the Press of Western New York: Proceedings of the Printers' Festival, Held January 18, 1847* (Rochester, NY: Jerome & Brother, Daily American Office, 1847), 1, 39, emphasis in original.

²⁵ A superb collection of such research is Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt's *American Journalism History Reader*. The volume contains thirty-one “important primary texts—research and essays about journalism from all stages of the history of the American press—alongside the works of journalism history and criticism.” Many of these works are cited throughout the dissertation. Brennen and Hardt, *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ii.

²⁶ See, for example, Chris Daly, “The Historiography of Journalism History: Part 1: ‘An Overview,’” *American Journalism* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 141–47; Margaret A. Blanchard, “The Ossification of Journalism History: A Challenge for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journalism History* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 107–12; Roy Atwood, “New Directions for Journalism Historiography,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, no. 4 (July 1978): 3–14; Tim Vos, “Beyond Our Subfield: Media History's Place in JMC Scholarship,” *Clio Among the Media* 46, no. 1 (Autumn 2011): 1, 3; John Nerone, “The Future of Communication History,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 3 (August 2006): 254–62; Brennen and Hardt, *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, 1, 9.

interwoven into the complex fabric of human life.”²⁷ The rich, “complex fabric” of American history is thoroughly intertwined with the history of the American press. The thoughts, beliefs, influences, and passions evident in newspapers and other printed material makes, as scholars William David Sloan and Michael Stamm stated, “the record of the mass media ... is one of the richest of historical sources, and it deserves the serious attention of historians.”²⁸ The cultural history presented in this dissertation was drawn from 1,617 newspaper articles in the Kirtland epoch of Mormonism discovered for this dissertation in newly digitized databases. These primary sources expose aspects of communication, journalism, and print histories not yet seen in such quantifiable detail.

Communication historian Chris Daly asserted that the discipline of American journalism history is as old as the country itself, and is “vital, given that the institutions of journalism are central to so many parts of American life.” Daly opined that, although many American historians use newspapers in their research, they do not study them.²⁹ The stage for this dissertation was further set when David Paul Nord proclaimed the early 1830s—the timeframe of this study—to be, perhaps, the most critical turning point in American press history, in part, because the “personal, even fanatical, editorship” of “participatory journalism” was essential to “the democratic function of journalism.”³⁰ This dissertation approaches Latter-day Saint Church history from the hitherto less-

²⁷ Atwood, “New Directions for Journalism Historiography,” 8.

²⁸ William David Sloan and Michael Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 3rd ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2010), 20.

²⁹ Daly, “The Historiography of Journalism History: Part 1: ‘An Overview,’” 141.

³⁰ David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 92, 93.

explored lens of communication studies—using the topic of Mormon-related printing as the vehicle to examine the Church’s adolescence during the most profound age of American printing, rather than the more common practice of using printed texts simply to augment other conclusions.

Marion Marzolf determined that a more comprehensive cultural history of American society necessarily includes the printers, editors, journalists and the mode of their creative output or report. Additionally, the culture in which the printing profession developed is invaluable to a greater synthesis of historical evidence.³¹ The communication history approach of this dissertation enriches both American and LDS Church history research by examining an additional node of influence. Robert A. Gross, coeditor of volume 2 in the prestigious *A History of the Book in America* series, averred that print history “challenges, complicates, revises, and enriches our picture of American life in an era of dramatic economic, political, social, and cultural change.”³² Furthermore, Martha Blauvelt noted the “extraordinary range of possibilities in Americans’ interactions with print between 1790 and 1840.”³³

This dissertation engages these observations and addresses gaps in the disciplines of communication history, American history, and Mormon history. More than 1,600

³¹ See Marion Marzolf, “Operationalizing Carey—An Approach to the Cultural History of Journalism,” *Journalism History* 2 (1975): 42.

³² Robert A. Gross, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *A History of the Book in America: An Extensive Republic, Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 6.

³³ M. T. Blauvelt, “A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2: An Extensive Republic; Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840 (Book Review),” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (November 29, 2011): 823.

artifacts were amassed and analyzed for this study. The findings complicate current understandings, suppositions, and generalizations of the printed atmosphere of the Mormon Kirtland epoch.

Sociologist Lester R. Kurtz observed that sufficient statistical findings in ethnography and history “can sometimes enable a scholar to discern patterns and trends in attitudes and behavior, and to see broad relationships among different kinds of attitudes and behavior.”³⁴ The boon of digitized sources from which the specified articles were extracted provides a missing triangulation of historical textual analysis within the mentioned fields. Patterns, trends in attitudes and behavior, and unexpected relationships manifested themselves in this study in ways not discussed in extant literature. And, what professor Terryl L. Givens wrote of early fictional depictions of Mormonism can now be categorically extended to nineteenth-century newspapers: the articles and editorials illustrate both the historical origin of anti-Mormonism and register the “psychological and ideological causes and consequences of those tensions among the non-Mormon populace.” Where Givens described his findings as “more than barometers of hostility or contempt,”³⁵ the thousands of pages of newspapers that have been examined for this study assert that nineteenth-century print served as an impressive indicator of American attitudes if studied in sufficient numbers.

The sense of individual and national self and the anxieties and contradictions exploited by editors from 1831 to 1837 reaffirmed that the more one “appreciates the

³⁴ Lester R. Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 10.

³⁵ Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

many dimensions of communication history and the way they connect to so many aspects of the past, the more it becomes clear that communication history has a place in the mainstream of social, economic, cultural, and political history.”³⁶ This dissertation, as a result of its fresh perspective, both affirms and revises previous research by methodically using newspapers to shine a light in unexplored historical corners such as agenda setting and vilification.

Mormon and Religious Academic Significance

Scholars have observed specific deficiencies in the fields of American, print, and religious histories and have encouraged other researchers to address them. For example, renowned nineteenth-century America researcher Nathan O. Hatch was concerned that “historians have been more adept at tracing the rise of the popular novel and daily newspaper than the emergence of a democratic religious culture in print.” Hatch wondered why historians have not demonstrated greater curiosity regarding the role of religion in the advance of nineteenth-century American culture. He regretted that

little energy has gone into exploring the forces of insurgent religious movements [of the 1800s. Extant studies] fail to take into account that, for better or worse, the most powerful popular movements in the early republic were expressly religious.³⁷

Whatever the power attributed to philanthropic, market, or industrial reforms and revolutions of the 1800s, Hatch avowed that “their presence cannot compare with the phenomenal growth and collective élan of Methodists, Baptists, Christians, Millerites,

³⁶ Givens, 4; Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 19.

³⁷ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 142, 224.

and Mormons.”³⁸ This dissertation addresses the deficiencies by examining the contributing factor of the press in the phenomenal growth and élan of the Mormons in their seven-year stay in Kirtland, Ohio.

American, print, religious, and Mormon histories likewise benefit from the more expansive context the largely unexplored communication-studies approach yields by providing a new historical lens not emphasized by traditional history fields—namely, journalism history. Scholars of Mormon and American history have frequently argued for placing Latter-day Saint history more firmly in the American culture in which it developed. Paul A. Gilje, author of multiple studies regarding rioting in nineteenth-century America, remembered an early admonition in his academic career to conceptualize topics in broader terms and to “fit the detail of the research into a larger interpretive framework.”³⁹ Paul Johnson and Sean Wilentz, researchers of the American religion of Robert Matthews, declared: “Historians are not satisfied with merely dredging up the secrets of the dead. We reestablish our stories as a part of their time and place.”⁴⁰ The broader time and place of nineteenth-century American printing has received only scant mention in Mormon and general religion literature thus far, and typically with purposes other than the study of Mormon print history itself. Hatch regretted this rushing “to explore more exotic themes [pertaining to Joseph Smith], such as the influence upon Joseph Smith of magic, alchemy, and the occult.” The pivotal documents of Mormonism,

³⁸ Hatch, 224.

³⁹ Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), ix.

⁴⁰ Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*, Updated Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 183.

Hatch claimed, have received far too little attention.⁴¹

The seminal work of James Carey, held as a clarion call to communication historians, exhorted the need for print studies to be “ventilated ... by fresh perspectives and interpretations.” This ventilation, according to Carey, would occur by developing the cultural history around print. His summon to action was clear: “I take the absence of any systematic cultural history of journalism [i.e., printed communication] to be the major deficiency in our teaching and research.”⁴² This dissertation fills the void for a systematic cultural history of Mormon-related printing by its collection and “ventilation” of its extraordinary corpus of printed texts. It provides a response to the indictment against some historians for merely reproducing rote Mormon history. John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius⁴³ charged certain Mormon historians with ignoring “the ideals and values of non-Mormon America, so there is virtually no cultural context for understanding” historical events in Mormonism. “Mormon innocence,” they continued, is thereby sustained by “professionally trained historians who apparently [choose] not to move

⁴¹ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 115. Mormon and scholar Terryl L. Givens offered an impressive answer to Hatch’s concern in his text on the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Although interesting, Givens’ focus was on the Book of Mormon itself as opposed to situating the new book of scripture in a chain of printing events that affected the course of the LDS Church and is outside the scope of this dissertation. See Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, 6.

⁴² James W. Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” *Journalism History*, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 4.

⁴³ At the time of their study, Hallwas was a professor of English and director of regional collections at Western Illinois University. Launius was chief historian at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration at Washington, D.C.

beyond the faith story and ask other legitimate questions.”⁴⁴ This dissertation considers both the progressions and regressions in a segment of LDS Church history that were influenced by print culture within and without the Church. It demonstrates with greater evidences and detail that Mormons were directly and incessantly driven by the culture and power of the American print atmosphere that surrounded them.

Why use the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as opposed to another religious or philanthropic body of which there was no shortage in the 1800s? The foremost answer is that no such study exists in Mormon research. The selection of the LDS Church also provides a distinctly American organization with a history directly linked to the evolution of the United States of America. It had not suffered centuries of European turmoil and prior restraint of its printing efforts, nor was it a transplanting and adaptation of anachronistic traditions. Its foundation was American culture, born into the era of “Jacksonian” politics,⁴⁵ national revulsion to imperialism, hegemony, elitism, and orthodoxy, and the unrestrainable march of manifest destiny. It brewed in the American cauldron of millennialism, rioting, populism, abolitionism, and uncensored print.⁴⁶ Few religions afforded such astounding Constitutional liberties have

⁴⁴ John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1995), 2–3.

⁴⁵ Historian Daniel Walker Howe noted the common use of “Jacksonian” as an adjective in historical works. He, however, preferred to “avoid the term because it suggests that Jacksonianism describes Americans as a whole” when, in actuality, “his political movement bitterly divided the American people.” Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

⁴⁶ *Millennialism* or *millenarianism* is “belief in the millennium of Christian prophecy (Revelation 20), the one thousand years when Christ is to reign on the earth, or

had the staying power and exhibited the worldwide expansion as Smith's church. As Armand L. Mauss stated: "Few American subcultures have realized the American dream as fully or rapidly as have the Mormons."⁴⁷

Givens claimed that "Mormons clearly provide an excellent opportunity for the study of a marginal category rife with inconsistencies, discord, and clever rhetorical strategies."⁴⁸ Douglas J. Davies, both recognized and gently rebuked another sociologist because he had "not appreciated the history-generating power of Mormonism" that "some envisage as developing into the next major religion of the world."⁴⁹

The accomplishments of Joseph Smith, whether one believes his claims or not, must, according to many scholars, be addressed.⁵⁰ These accomplishments, born on the frame of the printing press, are inescapable. As for the peculiarity of Smith's first new scripture, researcher Terryl L. Givens pronounced: "The Book of Mormon is perhaps the most religiously influential, hotly contested, and, in the secular press at least,

any religious movement that foresees a coming age of peace and prosperity." "Millennialism," *Merriam-Webster* (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2013), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/millennialism>; See Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*.

⁴⁷ Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 22.

⁴⁸ Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy*, 16.

⁴⁹ Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory* (Cornwall, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 165 fn16, 4.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 6; Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, 6; Jan Shipp, "The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 3–20; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 314.

intellectually underinvestigated book in America.”⁵¹ Historian Jan Shipps declared that whatever its source, the Book of Mormon “functions as a powerful and provocative synthesis of Biblical experience and the American dream, and it occupies a position of major importance in both the religious and intellectual history of the United States.”⁵² Shipps, generally considered to be the foremost non-Mormon scholar of Mormonism, reaffirmed her position a decade later with the assertion that despite other heavenly manifestations Smith claimed to have had, it was the “Gold Bible” that first attracted adherents.⁵³

The impact of this one literary influence on not only The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but also American history is evidenced in the inclusion of the Book of Mormon in *Book* magazine’s list of “20 Books That Changed America.”⁵⁴ With the 181st anniversary of the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon on E. B. Grandin’s

⁵¹ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, 6.

⁵² Shipps, “The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith,” 11.

⁵³ See Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 33.

⁵⁴ “20 Books That Changed America - ABC News,” January 7, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/WNN/story?id=132737&page=1&singlePage=true#.TzLyMoEpDpg>. The magazine endeavored to identify books that “had the greatest impact on the history of the country: the ones that led to concrete, definable changes in the way Americans lived their lives.” The list of twenty at which they arrived were “the books that forever changed the nation.” In addition to the Book of Mormon were Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, Frederick Douglass’ autobiography, the *Communist Manifesto*, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and others. Likewise, the contemporary website goodreads.com lists as one of its genres, “The 20 Books That Changed America Shelf.” Similar, but not identical to *Book* magazine’s list, it nonetheless includes the Book of Mormon. See “The 20 Books That Changed America Shelf,” accessed August 29, 2013, <http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/the-20-books-that-changed-america>.

hand press in Palmyra, New York, the LDS Church noted the distribution of the 150 millionth copy in over one hundred languages.⁵⁵ Scholars and historians in numerous fields have observed what Daniel Walker Howe expressed: “The Book of Mormon should rank among the great achievements of American literature, but it has never been accorded the status it deserves.”⁵⁶ During the book’s first fifteen years alone, editors discussed it in no fewer than 786 articles in 313 newspapers from 149 cities across thirty-three states and territories—as well as the Sandwich Islands, Canada, and England. The scope and breadth of the discussion of the book has been unknown until this dissertation.

The peculiar position of Mormonism in the history of America was presciently, albeit reluctantly, explicated by one of Smith’s contemporaries. In May 1844, Josiah Quincy Jr. (son of the president of Harvard College) and his companion, Charles Francis Adams (son of former president John Quincy Adams), met with Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois. Not persuaded by Smith’s tenets, Quincy was, nevertheless, awestruck by the potential of the now more-than-fledgling religion and its prophet. Later, he wrote:

It is by no means improbable that some future text-book, for the use of generations yet unborn, will contain a question something like this: What historical American of the nineteenth century has exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen? And it is by no means impossible that the answer to that interrogatory may be thus written: *Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet*. And the reply, absurd as it doubtless seems to most men now living, may be an obvious commonplace to their descendants. History deals in surprises and paradoxes quite as startling as this.... The possibilities of the

⁵⁵ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Book of Mormon Reaches 150 Million Copies - Church News and Events,” April 20, 2011, <https://www.lds.org/church/news/book-of-mormon-reaches-150-million-copies?lang=eng&query=book+mormon+languages>.

⁵⁶ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 314.

Mormon system are unfathomable.⁵⁷

In a modern light, Richard Dawkins, an Oxford professor well known for his atheist views and ridicule of the Book of Mormon, has stated that Mormonism, nevertheless, has “now become one of the most respectable mainstream religions of America.”⁵⁸ The history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offers a significant means to examine the role of print in a distinctive nineteenth-century American society.

Conclusion

Scholars and researchers have not focused on the nineteenth-century culture and advancement of American printing and its potentially overarching, central role in the establishment and development of one of America’s most prolific religions. The purpose of this dissertation is to present a cultural history that investigates print and print culture as an arbiter⁵⁹ in the experiences of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, from 1831 to 1837—the longest residence of the Church until the mobocratic death of Joseph Smith in 1844.⁶⁰ It elucidates the use of specific and repeated

⁵⁷ Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past: From the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888), 376, 377; italics in original.

⁵⁸ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 201.

⁵⁹ *Arbiter* is somebody or something “with great influence over what people say, think, or do.” “Encarta World English Dictionary,” *Encarta World English Dictionary [North American Edition]* (Microsoft Corporation, 2007), s.v. arbiter.

⁶⁰ Relating to, or advocating mobocracy, which is “government by a mob” or “the mob as a ruling body force.” “Mobocracy,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2013), <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/view/Entry/120502?redirectedFrom=Mobocrac>

agendas by both non-Mormon and Mormon editors and investigates the reactions to those agendas. The dissertation concludes with the findings to the two research questions and their multiple factors that played a part in directing the course of a controversial yet irrepressible American religion. Chapter 2 is the Review of Literature of texts relevant to this dissertation.

y#eid. These two terms, according to the OED, began to be used in the mid-1700s and are extant in literature of at least the first half of the nineteenth-century, including Mormon documents.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This dissertation draws on a unique blend of Latter-day Saint Church history and American history of the early nineteenth century. The research on American history can be further delineated into American religious history and American press history. The scope of these three areas is, obviously, massive. Each year, new, highly acclaimed works enter their respective fields and, in combination with the ever-increasing number and genres of popular histories, pose the formidable task of identifying the key sources that contain the most reliable information for this study. It would be a remarkable feat to plumb the depths of the nearly countless volumes written on the individual topics of the history of nineteenth-century America, its printing press, or even Mormon history. Nevertheless, this study does not presume to examine the impossible quantities of minutiae available in any of the three areas. This dissertation does, however, engage the foremost scholarship in each of these three topics to compose a broader, richer understanding of the emergence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in its developing years.

The historical method has been carefully employed to identify the primary sources upon which the dissertation research will be based, as well as the standard

authorities of secondary literature.⁶¹ This process is explained in further detail in Chapter 3, Method and Theories. For convenience and clarity, the review of literature groups the key sources into six categories: U.S. history,⁶² U.S. religious history, U.S. print history, U.S. religious print history, Mormon history, and Mormon print history.

U.S. History

A thorough grasp of American culture in the nineteenth century begins years earlier with the history and motives of the American colonialists. Foremost studies of the Colonial era include the research of Fred Anderson, Nicholas Canny, John H. Elliott, Brendan McConville, and Carla Pestana.⁶³ The issues of Indian relations and slavery are masterfully documented by Peter Silver, Rob Harper, and Colin Calloway for the former, and Trevor Burnard, Walter Johnson, and Steven Deyle for the latter.⁶⁴ The absence of

⁶¹ Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 51.

⁶² The terms *U.S. history* and *American history* will be used interchangeably in this dissertation. It is recognized that some might feel *American history* is more accurately the history of the Native American. Nevertheless, the history of the United States of America is regularly referenced as *American history* in the literature reviewed for this study. For example, Daniel Walker Howe repeatedly uses the term *American history* in his Pulitzer Prize-winning history of America from 1815 to 1848. He does not use the term *U.S. history* until page 430.

⁶³ See, respectively, Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001); Nicholas Canny, "Writing Atlantic History: Or, Reconfiguring the History of Colonial British America," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1093–1114; J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ See, respectively, Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2009); Rob

the mention of Mormonism in these texts is not surprising—Joseph Smith Jr. was not born until decades later. Nevertheless, this cultural history identifies elements of Colonialism that formed the nineteenth-century American print culture Joseph Smith encountered.

A primary American history text for the antebellum time frame of this dissertation is Daniel Walker Howe's Pulitzer Prize-winning work, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*.⁶⁵ Howe held a conviction that a full understanding of the past requires not just the "traditional subject matter of history" (e.g., political, diplomatic, and military events), but also the social, economic, and cultural developments that shaped the historical events.⁶⁶ Howe described the precipitous circumstances of the new republic, agricultural dependencies, awakenings of religion and millennialism, "overthrowing the tyranny of distance,"⁶⁷ the age of Andrew Jackson and succeeding presidential wrangling, and the national hypocrisy of slavery.

Departing from convention, Howe argued throughout his work that the "twin

Harper, "Looking the Other Way: The Gnadenhutten Massacre and the Contextual Interpretation of Violence," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3, 64, no. 3 (July 2007): 621–44; Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁵ See Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*.

⁶⁶ Howe, 1.

⁶⁷ Howe, chap. 6.

revolutions” of communication and transportation played the central role in the transformation of American life—the consequences of which “certainly rivaled, and probably exceeded in importance, those of the revolutionary ‘information highway’ of our own lifetimes.”⁶⁸ Howe’s emphasis and declaration that the “history of the young American republic is above all a history of battles over public opinion”⁶⁹ makes his research of exceeding value to this dissertation in its consideration of the shaping role of print in Mormonism. Howe’s study mentioned the Mormons in at least seven different instances, even recounting the story of Mormons secretly retrieving their Far West, Missouri, printing press. The press had been buried to protect it from the marauding mobs when the Saints were forced from Missouri. It was later set up as the Church’s voice in Nauvoo, Illinois, which falls after the scope of this study.⁷⁰ This dissertation builds on *What Hath God Wrought* by examining the communication revolution in a specific application of American religion, while simultaneously placing the development of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the context of American history.

Next, a more complete understanding of the often-brutal history of the LDS Church must consider the history of American violence. Leonard Richards penned the foundational text regarding antebellum violence in America and is cited by nearly every succeeding author who addresses the topic.⁷¹ He started simply: “This book is about

⁶⁸ Howe, 2.

⁶⁹ Howe, 6.

⁷⁰ See Howe, 723.

⁷¹ See, for example, David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gilje, *Rioting in America*; Paul D. Ellsworth, “Mobocracy and the Rule of Law: American Press Reaction to the Murder of

white Northerners who attacked abolitionists and blacks.”⁷² Despite this curt statement, Richards supported the theory that mobbing in America was not spontaneous outbursts of unrestrained fury, but rather, involved explicit planning and organization of prominent and articulate “gentlemen of property and standing.”⁷³ Richards researched the Baltimore, Maryland, *Niles Register* and evidenced that in the 1830s mob violence increased so much that it “became a feature of American life.”⁷⁴ Paul A. Gilje similarly proclaimed rioting to be an “American phenomenon,” an “epidemic” that is “still with us.”⁷⁵ Building on Richards’s claims that the selection of mob victims was neither “capricious nor random,” Gilje described in gruesome detail the sharpening of mob action into a “new art form.”⁷⁶ David Grimsted’s own accounts of mob viciousness further demonstrated that riots were “neither rare nor commonplace in antebellum society but a piece of the ongoing process of democratic accommodation, compromise, and uncompromisable tension between groups with different interests.”⁷⁷ Although violence against Mormons is mentioned in these three texts, none of them considered the impact of print on the

Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 20, no. 1 (1979): 1–12.

⁷² Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), vii.

⁷³ Richards, 5.

⁷⁴ Richards, 14. Richards’s statement, read in its entirety, is noteworthy for its emphasis: “In the 1830s, then, mob violence not only increased markedly but also became a feature of American life—not urban life, or Southern life, or Western life—but American life.”

⁷⁵ Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 3, 35.

⁷⁶ Gilje, 7, 67.

⁷⁷ Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, viii.

decisions and reactions of those engaged in mob violence.

Mobs of the 1800s formed and rioted against adultery, wife beaters, bawdy houses, customs regulations, drunken military officers, gambling, tenant depredations, the smallpox inoculation, wages, bank failures, disappointing fireworks and theatrical performances, intemperance, abolition and anti-abolition efforts, and issues surrounding the printing press. In this light, Gilje asserted that “to tell the story of rioting in American history is in large part to rehearse the story of *all* of American history.”⁷⁸ Such research reminds readers that Mormon history is not an isolated instance of prejudice and barbarity. Although it does not reduce the severity of their persecution, the Latter-day Saints suffered the common fate of those with divergent views in one of the most violent eras of American history, particularly when it involved the printed word. This cultural history is the first to consider the existence of a link between American editors’ agendas and the creating, shaping, changing, and directing of the Mormon trajectory in the atmosphere of American violence.

U.S. Religious History

This dissertation addresses a particular epoch of religiosity in American history and draws from key research in that field. Nathan O. Hatch researched the emergence of populist religions in the 1800s, including Mormonism. The country was replete with visionaries and Hatch’s crediting the success of early American religionists such as Elias Smith, Lorenzo Dow, Alexander Campbell, black preachers, and even Joseph Smith to their charisma has been cited and rebutted in the vast array of discussions on American

⁷⁸ Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 177; emphasis in original.

religious history.⁷⁹ Roger Finke and Rodney Starke added a contemporary sociological consideration to Hatch's argument. Contending that the charismatic-leader reasoning was insufficient, Finke and Starke sought the characteristics of "winners and losers in a free market religious environment that exposed religious organizations to relentless competition."⁸⁰ Finke and Starke discovered the recipe of the strongest of these religions, including Mormonism, to be long and complex, but with common variables: a theology that comforts souls, voluntary and repeated sacrifice, an element of mystery, and rituals that demanded synergism. An unexplored facet of both these texts is how Mormons used the press to exploit those ingredients using four specific agendas identified in this research.

This dissertation also builds on specific case studies of religions in nineteenth-century America. Mormonism was not alone in its peculiarities or theological origins. Historians and sociologists have even claimed that among its peers, Mormonism struggled to find an identity sufficiently different from its competitors to arouse interest.⁸¹ Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz investigated the "Kingdom of Matthias," the sexually charged, patriarchal order of the American prophet formerly known as Robert Matthews.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers*; Whittaker, "The Web of Print: Toward a History of the Book in Early Mormon Culture."

⁸⁰ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 1-2.

⁸¹ For a discussion of the "cherished possession" of "outsider status," particularly for new religions in America, see Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*, chap. 5.

Johnson and Wilentz described similarities between Matthews's "cult" and Mormonism, as well as his encounter with "fellow prophet" Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio.⁸² Though not a central point in their text, the researchers did relate some of the press's reaction to Matthew's doings. The Mormons were not unique in the angst they created in American newspapers.

A more general view of the history of religion in America must include the research of Sydney E. Ahlstrom, and Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt.⁸³ Ahlstrom dissected the emigration of religion from Europe to the Colonies and chronicled the development of even the most obscure religious thought in America up to the 1960s in his tome, *A Religious History of the American People*. Ahlstrom's presentation of biographical background, culture, and religious theory and his description of the organization, beliefs, and theology of countless churches supported his "firm conviction that the moral and spiritual development of the American people is one of the most intensely relevant subjects on the face of the earth."⁸⁴ Leigh Schmidt's most recent revised edition of Edwin Gaustad's *A Religious History of America*, originally published in 1966, made the distinguished narrative of American religious history more accessible.⁸⁵ Gaustad was a prolific scholar of religion in America and presented his

⁸² Johnson and Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*, 3.

⁸³ See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Edwin S. Gaustad and Leigh E. Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2004).

⁸⁴ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, xiii.

⁸⁵ Gaustad and Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*, ix.

research in various documentary histories and acclaimed historical atlases.⁸⁶

Both *A Religious History of the American People* and *The Religious History of America* mention the “famous”⁸⁷ *Religion in America* that Robert Baird printed in 1844.⁸⁸ Since Baird published contemporaneously to the time frame of this dissertation, his book is a valuable primary source as it reflects in print the prevailing perceptions of Americans about the character of the assorted religious organizations of their time.

U.S. Print History and the First Amendment Freedom of Speech and of the Press

The early American Republic witnessed printed works “by the bale” inasmuch that one printer proclaimed that it was “without stint” the “**Era of Paper, and the Age of Print.**”⁸⁹ According to Robert Hoe’s 1902 observation, no period since the time of Gutenberg witnessed such rapid and numerous advancements in printing technology as the nineteenth century.⁹⁰ The explosion of newspapers, pamphlets, tracts, and books was

⁸⁶ See, for example, Edwin S. Gaustad, ed., *A Documentary History of Religion in America: To the Civil War*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Edwin S. Gaustad, Philip L. Barlow, and Richard W. Dishno, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁸⁷ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 8.

⁸⁸ See Robert Baird, *Religion in America: Or, An Account of the Origin, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844).

⁸⁹ Grenville Mellen, *The Age of Print: A Poem, Delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, 26 August 1830* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1830), 5; emphasis in original.

⁹⁰ See Robert Hoe, *A Short History of the Printing Press And of the Improvements in the Printing Machinery from the Time of Gutenberg up to the Present Day* (New York: The Gilliss Press, 1902), especially 5-6.

borne on the back of both the new technologies of stereotype plates, power presses, American-made continuous rolls of paper, and the undying tenacity of single-imprint, artisan printing. Scholars have hitherto examined far-reaching facets of American printing including religious, partisan, abolition, anti-abolition, Native American and Freethought presses, as well as the penny press, American reprints of British novels, American novels, the black press, and numerous others.

A particularly useful resource is the American Antiquarian Society's (AAS) five-volume work titled, *A History of the Book in America*.⁹¹ Most applicable for the time frame of this dissertation is Volume 2, *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*. Belying the title of the series, *The History of the Book in America* is far more inclusive of the history of American print in general. The unity of the authors and the breadth and depth of the subject matter makes this work an invaluable reference manual for researchers. The compilation included a juxtaposition of mass printing and rural printing, the functional side of nineteenth-century copyright and reprints, the entanglement of printing and politics, the relationship between schools, libraries, and textbooks, and various periodicals of the evangelical press. Of interest among the essays were John L. Brooke's "Print and Politics," David Paul Nord's "Benevolent Books: Printing, Religion, and Reform," and Andie Tucher's "Newspapers and Periodicals." The overall work showed that "an expanding press *was* a visible force

⁹¹ Scholars laud the AAS program. For example, Angela Vietto described the project as a "landmark work." "A History of the Book in America. Vol. 2. An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840 (Book Review)," *Early American Literature* 47, no. 3 (June 2012): 709–12. See also Donald G. Davis, Jr., "A History of the Book in America, Volume One (Book Review)," *Libraries & Culture* 36, no. 2 (2001): 387, 389.

for change in the nation, its impact registered in every area of American life.”⁹² The findings of this dissertation illuminate in distinctive ways that the development of Mormonism was, along with “every area of American life,” intimately tied to the effects of the press.

Another useful reference library of the history of print in America is *The American Journalism History Reader* by editors Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt.⁹³ Different than the almost-all-original essays of *The History of the Book*, Brennen and Hardt compiled a collection of thirty-one seminal journal articles and book chapters spanning the progress of communication from Benjamin Franklin to the Associated Negro Press. The *Reader* has such breadth as to detail the rise of the telegraph and wireless communication, as well as the foundational communication theories of James Carey, Margaret Blanchard, and Michael Schudson. Taxed with the burden of choosing the most central writings regarding approximately two hundred years of journalism history, Brennen and Hardt traversed each decade of American history in a straightforward but not overly rigid chronological fashion. The essays reinforced their thesis of the “centrality of communication as a social process through which society accumulates knowledge, acts on information, and moves forward in a constructive manner while the press emerges as an institution of social control and moral guidance.”⁹⁴ Portions of the book include some mention of the interaction of press and religion, but the

⁹² Gross, “Editor’s Introduction,” 4; italics in original.

⁹³ Brennen and Hardt, *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*.

⁹⁴ Brennen and Hardt, 2.

relationship is, at best, sparsely recognized. Such gaps indicate the need for studies such as this.

The culture of American print is a result of the interpretation of First Amendment speech and press freedoms by United States citizens and courts. A fuller contextual understanding of nineteenth-century America includes that the Bill of Rights, together with the First Amendment, began only as a federal law. Its freedoms were mirrored in most states by their own choice; however, it was not until the Fourteenth Amendment and the 1925 decision of *Gitlow v. United States*⁹⁵ that individual states became obligated to guarantee their citizens the federally mandated rights. Thus, despite the new democracy's famed ideologies, its citizens had no assurance for the protection of their speech or presses from the national government during the time frame studied in this dissertation.

Jeffery A. Smith demonstrated this ideological struggle of Americans exploring and testing their freedom of the press as the nation pondered what constituted the protected "liberty," and what was merely an attempt to justify "licentiousness."⁹⁶ Smith also identified the conundrum faced by editors desirous of establishing a "free press," interpreted in the 1700s and 1800s as a press unaffiliated with a particular political party.

⁹⁵ See *Gitlow v. New York*, 268 U.S. 652 (1925).

⁹⁶ See Jeffery A. Smith, *Printers and Press Freedom: The Ideology of Early American Journalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 164.

This dialogue has also been illuminated by Stephen Botein,⁹⁷ Barbara Cloud,⁹⁸ Michael Schudson,⁹⁹ Richard D. Brown,¹⁰⁰ and Andie Tucher.¹⁰¹ Even those who were eyewitness to the political wrangling of the press observed of their own time “the reckless and unhallowed spirit of political controversy, which, no one will deny, is carried on in a manner that deserves unqualified reprobation.”¹⁰² It was impossible for Mormonism to

⁹⁷ Stephen Botein noted: “It was obvious that the political loyalties of printers could be crucial in determining who would be their customers, or readers, and who would not.” “Printers and the American Revolution,” in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 92.

⁹⁸ Print historian Barbara Cloud declared that most frontier papers were neutral—until the first election. See *The Coming of the Frontier Press: How the West Was Really Won*, 22.

⁹⁹ Journalism historian Michael Schudson proclaimed: “It is difficult for us today to fully grasp how deeply partisanship ran in nineteenth-century American journalism.” “Toward a Troubleshooting Manual for Journalism History,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 469.

¹⁰⁰ Richard D. Brown wrote that “print and newspapers became securely established as legitimate instruments of politics.” However, the “nature of their political role, the extent of their freedom, and [their] legitimate boundaries” was never entirely fixed. “The Revolution’s Legacy for the History of the Book,” in *A History of the Book in America: An Extensive Republic, Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 62.

¹⁰¹ Andie Tucher observed the central position of newspapers in politics. They were, she wrote, “vital tools used by political leaders to persuade, disarm, inspire, excite, extort, and mobilize the citizens whose votes they sought.” Then, in as much sarcasm as the printed word can offer, she concluded, “Sometimes they informed them, too.” “Newspapers and Periodicals,” in *A History of the Book in America: An Extensive Republic, Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 399.

¹⁰² Mellen, *The Age of Print: A Poem, Delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, 26 August 1830*, 40; see also Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1854), 200.

avoid the acidic culture of American print in its adolescence. The “freedom” of the press in the early nineteenth century, for many, resulted in disillusionment, captivity, and death. The Mormons are a prime example.

Thomas McAfee’s First Amendment argument on the uses and limitations of interpreting the Constitution through the lens of the drafters’ “original intent” identified the tension between natural rights and the acrimonious debate over the Bill of Rights.¹⁰³ These strains, complicated by the wrestle between state and federal powers, evidence themselves in the historical writings of the LDS Church. A version of McAfee’s paper printed in *BYU Studies* included an address on the Mormon view of the divine instigation of the Constitution and the freedoms that allowed Joseph Smith to establish the Church.¹⁰⁴ Another essay that offered insight into Mormon thought on the First Amendment was an essay by Bruce C. Hafen, then dean of the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University. Hafen reiterated the general conservative Mormon attitude toward the freedom of speech: “Some sense of restraint is essential to maintaining a free, democratic society over the long term. In that sense, the concept of limits is the friend, not the enemy, of individual liberty.”¹⁰⁵ This Mormon position relies heavily on the ideas of John Locke (1632-1704) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ See Thomas B. McAfee, “Constitutional Interpretation: The Uses and Limitations of Original Intent,” *University of Dayton Law Review* 12 (Winter 1986): 275–95.

¹⁰⁴ See Thomas B. McAfee, “Constitutional Interpretation and the American Tradition of Individual Rights,” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 3 (1987): 139–69.

¹⁰⁵ Bruce C. Hafen, “Bicentennial Reflections on the Media and the First Amendment,” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 3 (1987): 12.

¹⁰⁶ Locke proposed a “social contract theory” that described government as the

U.S. Religious Print History

A review of American religious print history consistently points to the accomplishments of the American Bible Society (ABS) and American Tract Society (ATS) in the first few decades of the 1800s.¹⁰⁷ David Paul Nord, among the foremost scholars on religious print, has commented extensively on the achievements of the two societies, going so far as to claim that religious printing was largely responsible for the development of printing technology in the early 1800s. Nord detailed how evangelical publicists of the early century were led “inexorably” to New York, the center of American printing, to take advantage of stereotyping, steam-powered printing, and American machine-made paper.¹⁰⁸ Through efforts labeled “general supply” and “differential pricing,” the ABS and ATS set the presumptuous goals of placing a Bible on the hearths of every American home and a religious tract in the hands of every American.¹⁰⁹ Their zeal resulted in the printing and distributing of tens of millions of

willful yielding of power by citizens to a central organization in exchange for protection of rights and liberties. See John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (London: R. Butler, 1821), bk. 2. He also wrote letters concerning the principles of religious toleration. See John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (London: Awnsham Churchill, 1689). Lockean principles are evident in Mormon print. Furthermore, John Stuart Mill was a contemporary of Joseph Smith, born one year after Smith in England. One of his most readily identifiable works was *On Liberty*. Although it was published in 1859, fifteen years after the death of Joseph Smith, his theories and claims regarding the “tyranny of the majority,” the error of silencing opinions, and the prevention of harms are easily detected in Mormon print. See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 2nd ed. (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859).

¹⁰⁷ See Gross, “Editor’s Introduction,” 35–36.

¹⁰⁸ See David Paul Nord, “The Evangelical Origins of Mass Media in America, 1815-1835,” *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Journalism Monographs* 88 (May 1984): 1–30.

¹⁰⁹ Nord, 12.

religious texts in a country of only three million households.¹¹⁰

Add to this the achievement of the American Sunday School Union, which published 224 separate editions of books, pamphlets, and periodicals amounting to more than fourteen million pages in just a few short years.¹¹¹ Andie Tucher¹¹² and James N. Green¹¹³ both observed, nevertheless, that the impressive, rapidly developing printing technology was unreachable and unfeasible for most local printers. Hand presses using paper made from cheaper bleached rags remained competitive and local printers set their own lofty printing goals. This dissertation builds on the research done by Nord and others by adding Mormon printing to the discussion.¹¹⁴

Rosalind Beiler delineated the effectiveness of religious communication

¹¹⁰ See David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84.

¹¹¹ See Nord, 86.

¹¹² See Tucher, “Newspapers and Periodicals,” 404.

¹¹³ See James N. Green, “The Rise of Book Publishing,” in *A History of the Book in America: An Extensive Republic, Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 113–15.

¹¹⁴ For example, Joseph Smith contracted with local Palmyra, New York, printer Egbert B. Grandin in 1829 to print an imposing five thousand copies of the Book of Mormon on his single-impression (Peter) Smith Improved Printing Press, also known as the “Iron Acorn Press” because of its distinctive acorn shape. Later, Joseph Smith and other leading men of the Church ordered an initial ten thousand copies of the Book of Commandments to be printed by Mormon printer William W. Phelps in Missouri on what is thought to have been a Washington Hand Press. Phelps’s press was destroyed before the reduced number of three thousand copies was complete. Nevertheless, both the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants went through multiple versions and editions by Smith’s death in 1844. For descriptions of these two printing presses, see Hoe, *A Short History of the Printing Press And of the Improvements in the Printing Machinery from the Time of Gutenberg up to the Present Day*, 8–9; J. Luther Ringwalt, *American Encyclopedia of Printing* (Philadelphia: Menamin & Ringwalt, 1871), 359.

networks, which provided dissenters the means for legitimizing their positions, particularly with state authorities.¹¹⁵ Beiler's account of the persecution and expulsion of European Mennonite, Quaker, and Pietist communities had remarkable similarities to the history of the Latter-day Saints. This dissertation expands on her research by revealing the centrality of communication in the Mormon agenda of strengthening identity and maintaining unity among the persecuted society of Mormons as found in newspapers produced by and for Mormon readers.

Nathan O. Hatch similarly commented on the inestimable power of religious print: "Religious periodicals had, by 1830, become the grand engine of a burgeoning religious culture, primary means of production for, and bond of union within, competing religious groups." Universalists, Methodists, Baptists, and others "blanketed the nation" with millions of pieces of religious literature.¹¹⁶ Hatch listed statistical data of the printing accomplishments of many of these religions and, even though he does mention the Mormons as one of the consequences of American populism,¹¹⁷ he does not afford them the same detail as he does other "heralds of an age of mass media."¹¹⁸ The deeper

¹¹⁵ See Rosalind J. Beiler, "Dissenting Religious Communication Networks and European Migration, 1660-1710," in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia Denault (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 210–36.

¹¹⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 126.

¹¹⁷ Hatch explained that "America exalted religious leaders short on social graces, family connections, and literary education" who "pitched their messages to the unschooled and unsophisticated" as opposed to the traditional methods of European elitist clergy. "Religious populism," he continued, reflected "the passions of ordinary people and the charisma of democratic movement-builders." This yearning for "populist" familiarity "remains among the oldest and deepest impulses in American life." Hatch, 5.

¹¹⁸ Hatch, 128.

look at Mormon printing in this dissertation extends Hatch's work by demonstrating the extent of the effect of print about and by one such religious group.

One more work of David Paul Nord holds a principal position in the research on American religious printing: a compilation of his essays spanning nearly twenty years in *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*. Nord placed the American "reading revolution" as a catalyst in the market revolution.¹¹⁹ Reading, particularly religious reading, became commodified, mass-produced, and was distributed to every corner of the nation. He related the tireless yet wearisome experiences of itinerant missionaries and the conflicted occupation of colporteurs—traveling book distributors commissioned to sell the word of God. The Mormons are only mentioned once in the text in a footnote about the ATS recommending a greater dispersion of the printed Gospel to quell the spirit of rebellion in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1844.¹²⁰ Many Mormon missionaries became prolific printers and their works hold an important place in Mormon printing. Although they were published after the time frame of this study, insightful research has been done on the subject.¹²¹

American print history of the first half of the 1800s is no less than astounding. The impact of the communication revolution of this era went unrivaled for nearly two centuries. The volume of printed material and the developing nature of debate, rhetoric,

¹¹⁹ Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*, 6.

¹²⁰ See Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*.

¹²¹ See, for example, David J. Whittaker, "Early Mormon Pamphleteering," *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 35–49; David J. Whittaker, "Early Mormon Pamphleteering" (Brigham Young University, 1982).

and politics were explosive in U.S. history. Religious printing spurred the process and set the stage for the most religious decades in America. The presence of Mormon printing in this unparalleled time is grossly understudied. Smith produced four new books of scripture, completed a manuscript of revisions to the Bible published after his lifetime, participated in the production of no fewer than six Mormon newspapers, and translated and published two ancient scriptural texts. The Book of Mormon has been translated into eighty-two languages and more than 150 million copies have been printed.¹²² This dissertation helps address the neglect of Mormon printing by providing an enriching piece to the vibrant puzzle of American print history.

Mormon History

The number of available secondary sources on Mormon history is nearly overwhelming and is increasing. As Mormon historian Richard L. Bushman declared, “We are dealing with mountains of information.”¹²³ Accounts of LDS Church history were, for quite some time, primarily told by apologists. Much of what was available was whitewashed and, in the form of popular history, was pleasantly palatable to believers who preferred not to have to deal with the cognitive dissonance elicited by thoughts of an imperfect past.¹²⁴ Thus, valuable historical commentaries such as Fawn Brodie’s *No Man*

¹²² See “The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” www.mormonnewsroom.org, accessed December 6, 2017, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/book-of-mormon>.

¹²³ Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, xix.

¹²⁴ For example, Mormon antagonist D. P. Hurlbut collected affidavits against Joseph Smith and his family in the early 1830s during which time he claimed to have found an unpublished manuscript by one Solomon Spaulding that purported to be the original text of the Book of Mormon. The claim is detailed in Chapter 6. For scathing

*Knows My History*¹²⁵ were scorned and strongly rebutted by many in the Church.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, Brodie's research showed signs of assiduousness and brought to light primary sources not known to the bulk of Mormon membership. Brodie, herself a disaffected Mormon, exerted a great deal of effort debunking the core beliefs of Mormonism, at one time even attributing the claimed supernatural visions of Smith's cohorts to "Joseph's unconscious but positive talent at hypnosis."¹²⁷ Ironically, Brodie also discredited some of the most poignant anti-Mormon theories, such as the Spaulding Manuscript alleged to be the true source of the Book of Mormon.¹²⁸ Brodie's work raised many questions and propelled more serious scholarship in answer to her accusations.¹²⁹

The most recent comprehensive work on Joseph Smith intended to supplant Brodie's work is Richard L. Bushman's cultural biography published in 2005: *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*.¹³⁰ The title displayed his desire to humanize Smith with all

criticisms of this type of history, see Hallwas and Launius, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois*, 1–4; see also Jan Shipps, "The Mormon Past: Revealed or Revisited?," *Sunstone*, December 1981.

¹²⁵ See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Brodie's work was first published in 1945 and, to date, has not been out of print.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Hugh W. Nibley, "No, Ma'am, That's Not History," accessed September 14, 2013, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=47>.

¹²⁷ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 77.

¹²⁸ See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, Appendix B.

¹²⁹ See Marvin S. Hill, "Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1972, 72–85.

¹³⁰ See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). Bushman's initial efforts along this vein were published

his foibles, passions, and weaknesses.¹³¹ He placed Mormonism in the broader context of American history—a primary purpose of this dissertation. Bushman accounted for economics, politics, Jacksonian prejudices, slavery, and the clout of the printed word. Latter-day Saint scholarship is aided by his access to hitherto inaccessible original Mormon documents now being published as part of The Joseph Smith Papers Project,¹³² and by his diligent chronicling of sources.

Scholars of Mormon history in recent decades regularly apply academically established historical research methods and are examining an ever-widening view of the progress of the Church.¹³³ Most studies are delimited to specific events as opposed to the chronological tome of Bushman. For example, Thomas M. Spencer published a collection of essays from various scholars and historians regarding the Mormon conflicts in Missouri. Subjects included the Mormon fervor for Zionism¹³⁴ and millenarianism, Smith's perceived failure to establish and later to redeem Zion, temple building, and

more than two decades earlier and represented one of the landmark attempts at a comprehensive understanding of Joseph Smith. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Large portions of the book were reprinted in the later, impressive expansion of *Rough Stone Rolling*.

¹³¹ Joseph Smith described himself as a rough stone rolling down a hill having his coarse edges smoothed out as he came into contact with other objects. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage, 2007), viii.

¹³² See “The Joseph Smith Papers,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/>.

¹³³ “Impressions of a Prophet: Part 1,” *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City, UT: Mormon Channel, August 8, 2010), <http://www.mormonchannel.org/joseph-smith-papers-season-1/3>.

¹³⁴ *Zionism* is the Christian belief of establishing a community “where God lives and is worshiped on Earth.” See “Encarta World English Dictionary,” s.v. Zion.

frontier violence.¹³⁵ John E. Hallwas and Roger D. Launius compiled a documentary history of the Mormon difficulties in Illinois. In their evocative collection of approximately one hundred primary-source documents, interspersed with headnotes revealing their own strong opinions regarding LDS history, Hallwas and Launius theorized that the “so-called Mormon conflict ... was not a matter of religious persecution.” It was, instead, an “ideological struggle between two cultures—that is, groups with differing social visions.” Hallwas and Launius selected provocative evidence to reveal the moral turpitude of the group of people they unequivocally declared to be hypocritically called Saints.¹³⁶ Both of these books included instances of Mormon printing as part of their narrative; nevertheless, the examples are used simply to emphasize other conclusions.

Mormon history scholarship has focused heavily on the circumstances and events surrounding the death of Joseph Smith. Historians Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister proposed the theory that the deaths of the Smith brothers were not simply the result of disgruntled outsiders incited to mob action against religious pariahs. They, instead, argued, sometimes inconclusively,¹³⁷ that it was a political assassination crafted by the Whig party.¹³⁸ In proving their theory, they discounted what might have been

¹³⁵ See Spencer, *The Missouri Mormon Experience*.

¹³⁶ Hallwas and Launius, *Cultures in Conflict: A Documentary History of the Mormon War in Illinois*, 1, 4–8.

¹³⁷ Wicks and Foister use the absence of evidence in some instances as evidence on which to base their conclusions.

¹³⁸ See Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister, *Junius and Joseph: Presidential Politics and the Assassination of the First Mormon Prophet* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2005).

strengthening evidence of the powerful American tendency to conscientious, adroit mob violence as described by Leonards, Gilje, and Grimsted. A thorough, expert legal examination of the same events is *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* by Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill. This lawyer/historian partnership acknowledged the political motivation behind the murders, but also accounted for the “brutal but familiar American tradition of vigilante activity.” Oaks and Hill itemized the incredulities of the somewhat farcical trial of the murderers while at the same time demonstrating that American courts of the 1800s (including those in Mormon communities) regularly stacked juries to lean toward prevailing attitudes—a process known as “jury nullification.”¹³⁹ Additionally, a discussion on Nauvoo almost inevitably entails a description of the consolidation of power and control in the theocratic “kingdom” of Joseph Smith as described by Robert B. Flanders¹⁴⁰ in 1975 and appended by Roger D. Launius and John E. Hallwas in 1996.¹⁴¹ Studies such as these demonstrate the viability of using the Mormon community as a research tool.

Mormon Print History

This dissertation investigated the influence of the printing press on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, from 1831 to 1837 inclusively.

¹³⁹ See Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 6, 201, 211–12.

¹⁴⁰ See Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

¹⁴¹ See Launius and Hallwas, *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History*.

Therefore, a key component of this literature review is an examination of research performed along similar strains. As yet, no specific study has been discovered that tied events of LDS Church history together in an examination of agenda setting or vilification in the culture of American print and the First Amendment atmosphere of freedom of the press. There are, nonetheless, numerous studies that address elements of Mormon and non-Mormon print as they recount the story of Mormon history. Some of these works devote in-depth commentary to the idea of freedom of the press when it plays a central role in whatever Mormon historical event the larger work addresses. This dissertation sought to determine if these individual, unconnected occurrences could be assembled into a cohesive collection of topical agendas that illuminated the forces the press had on the development of the Church in the consolidated timeframe and geography of Kirtland, Ohio, from 1831 to 1837.

Notable instances of the limited recognition of the importance of the press in Mormon history include Terryl L. Givens's previously mentioned work dedicated to the publication of the Book of Mormon, "the American scripture that launched a new world religion." Givens's book demonstrated the primary role the Book of Mormon plays in the existence and sustainability of the Church. Givens quoted Wilfred Cantwell Smith's observation that "religious movements have each a book, [and] a new religious movement must have a new written book."¹⁴² Givens's research lends credence to the premise of this dissertation that Mormon publishers/editors claimed a voice in the explosive printing advancement of the first half of the nineteenth century.

¹⁴² Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, 3.

Nathaniel Hinckley Wadsworth approached the printing process of the Book of Mormon from a legal standpoint. Wadsworth presented a critical investigation into the validity of Smith's copyright and the encounter with Palmyra editor Abner Cole, who printed unauthorized extracts of the Book of Mormon in his newspaper. Wadsworth considered elements such as intellectual property, common law, statutory law, and federal jurisdiction over copyright in the late 1700s. Wadsworth concluded that Smith's copyright was deficient and that there were few enforceable legal restraints that would have prevented someone else from printing the Book of Mormon without Smith's consent.¹⁴³

Historians such as M. Hamlin Cannon, Russell R. Rich, Joseph W. Barnes, and Andrew Hedges have commented on the various doings and motivations of Abner Cole and his confrontation with Smith over the freedom of speech and press.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, despite the worthiness and applicability of their research to this dissertation, their studies

¹⁴³ Nathaniel Hinckley Wadsworth, "Copyright Laws and the 1830 Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006): 86. Wadsworth's conclusion is based on a technical understanding copyright law in 1830. The arbitration between Smith and Cole regarding Cole's reprinting of Book of Mormon text in his newspaper, of which there is no record, most likely did not examine Smith's copyright process in such detail. Or, if it did, found Smith to have complied with the copyright process as well as was customary to the time despite its letter-of-the-law deficiency.

¹⁴⁴ See, respectively, M. Hamlin Cannon, "Contemporary Views of Mormon Origins (1830)," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 31, no. 2 (September 1944): 261–66; Russell R. Rich, "The Dogberry Papers and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies*, 1970, 315–20; Joseph W. Barnes, "Obediah Dogberry Rochester Freethinker," *Rochester History* 36, no. 3 (July 1974): 1–24; Andrew H. Hedges, "The Refractory Abner Cole," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Truman G. Madsen et al. (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research & Mormon Studies, 2002); Andrew H. Hedges, "Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen - The Refractory Abner Cole," accessed November 30, 2013, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=100&chapid=1119>.

were understandably delimited to one specific moment in Mormon or American history. Even those who wrote longer histories, such as Fawn Brodie¹⁴⁵ and Richard L. Bushman,¹⁴⁶ mentioned Cole as more of a speed bump in Mormon history than considering this printing event as part of a longer stream of influence. These works demonstrate the absence of a broader analysis of the influence of print on the development of the Church over time.

Scholars such as Donald Q. Cannon have performed content analyses on nineteenth-century American newspapers in search of discussions concerning Mormonism.¹⁴⁷ David J. Whittaker focused his lens on one of the primary tools of Mormon missionaries of the 1800s: pamphleteering. Whittaker described the print environment in which Mormonism took shape as “especially pregnant with pamphlet literature.” The Latter-day Saints quickly adopted this tool and its use “had, and continues to have,” wrote Whittaker, “important ramifications for the church.” Whittaker’s article on one element of the importance of print in Mormon culture is of exceptional importance to this dissertation, which enlarges his claim that studying print offers “the historian a meaningful look into the Mormonism of their day and a view of one stage in the evolution of the church.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 16–17.

¹⁴⁶ See Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 81, 88, 94, 104.

¹⁴⁷ See Cannon, “In the Press: Early Newspaper Reports on the Initial Publication of the Book of Mormon.”

¹⁴⁸ Whittaker, “Early Mormon Pamphleteering,” 1977, 36, 38, 49. Whittaker’s article was expanded into a doctoral dissertation. See Whittaker, “Early Mormon Pamphleteering,” 1982.

Whittaker is the most prolific publisher of studies on Mormon printing. His works include articles on early Mormon literature and thought, Mormon imprints in Great Britain and South Africa, and plural marriage.¹⁴⁹ In 1997 he continued with an examination of the history of Mormon printed matter, including broadsides, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, and books. Whittaker posited his article as a “Needs and Opportunities for Research” call to scholars to examine the claim that “the variety of early Mormon publications testify how valuable the printing press was to the Church’s survival.... Wherever Mormons established themselves, they left a published record of their presence.”¹⁵⁰ This dissertation responds to Whittaker’s call for additional research and takes a giant leap forward from his findings by its review of thousands of newspaper articles by and about the Mormons not available to scholars of his day.

Paul D. Ellsworth most closely mirrored the communication-studies lens of this dissertation in his evaluation of the American press reaction to the murder of Joseph Smith, which was seven years after the focus of this dissertation. Opinions in newspapers from all over the country ranged from both sides of the spectrum: castigation for the

¹⁴⁹ See, for example David J. Whittaker, “The ‘Articles of Faith’ in Early Mormon Literature and Thought,” in *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1987), 63–92; Peter Crawley and David J. Whittaker, “Mormon Imprints in Great Britain and the Empire, 1837-1857,” *Friends of the Brigham Young University Library Newsletter*, no. 30 (1987); David J. Whittaker, “Almanacs in the New England Heritage of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 14 (Fall 1989): 89–113; David J. Whittaker, “Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses,” *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 43–63; David J. Whittaker, “‘The Bone in the Throat’: Orson Pratt and the Public Announcement of Plural Marriage,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 18 (July 1987): 293–314.

¹⁵⁰ Whittaker, “The Web of Print: Toward a History of the Book in Early Mormon Culture,” 2, 11.

illegal mob action and lynching of confined prisoners, as well as unfettered rebuke for the Mormons who violated the sacred privilege of freedom of the press when destroying the *Nauvoo (IL) Expositor*.¹⁵¹

Mormon lore is incomplete without the infamy of the destruction of the *Expositor*. The exhaustive, widely recognized examination of the legality of the actions of the Nauvoo City Council in razing the dissident press is Dallin H. Oaks' *Utah Law Review* article published in 1965.¹⁵² Oaks noted the irony surrounding the *Expositor* press, the supposed free press issue of "combustible materials awaiting only a spark to set them aflame to work death and destruction" and the actual charge against the city council of "riot."¹⁵³ Oaks recognized the fact that the First Amendment did not apply to individual states during this time and instead, based his examination on what was in force: the Illinois Constitution of 1818, which did have a freedom of the press clause. Oaks concluded that Smith and the Council clearly violated state law in only one instance—the

¹⁵¹ A single issue of the *Nauvoo (IL) Expositor*, printed in June 1844 by disaffected persons from Smith's inner circle, promised to expose Smith and key elements of his doctrine including plural marriage. Smith, who was Nauvoo City Mayor, and the city council voted to silence the press, which was burned in the street. See Ellsworth, "Mobocracy and the Rule of Law: American Press Reaction to the Murder of Joseph Smith."

¹⁵² See Dallin H. Oaks, "The Suppression of the Nauvoo Expositor," *Utah Law Review* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1965): 862–903.

¹⁵³ When Smith and the others posted bail in the County seat of Carthage, Illinois, for the "riot" charge and began to return to Nauvoo, he was rearrested for "treason" for declaring martial law in Nauvoo. Smith called out the Nauvoo Legion, the local chartered militia, to enforce a curfew and the skepticism of strangers after the destruction of the *Expositor* as a measure to prevent reactive mob action. Bail was not allowed for the charge of treason and Smith and others were confined in Carthage jail where they were killed two days later. See "The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith," *The Joseph Smith Papers* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Mormon Channel, September 29, 2009), <http://www.mormonchannel.org/joseph-smith-papers-season-1/3>.

destruction of the printing press itself, which inflicted prior restraint on future, unpublished papers. The absence of laws prohibiting the deeds of the City Council makes, according to Oaks, all other claims and criticisms “not well founded.”¹⁵⁴ Oaks’s investigation of the reality of free press in small American towns is a valuable reminder to consider historical events in light of historical culture in which they took place.

From there, the study of Mormon print meanders through an array of fascinating topics; yet, as has been observed, the research is interesting, but unconnected and sparse.¹⁵⁵ Likewise informative but prior to the scope of this dissertation is Larry C. Porter’s insightful information regarding the historical setting for the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, including the style of printing press used to print the book.¹⁵⁶

Lastly, are the helpful annotated bibliographies of Peter Crawley, and Chad J.

¹⁵⁴ Oaks, “The Suppression of the Nauvoo Expositor,” 903.

¹⁵⁵ For example, though beyond the scope of this dissertation, research into Mormon printing has also included a content analysis of the treatment of Chinese immigrants in the Mormon town of Ogden, Utah, during and after the completion of the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s. See Andrew Taylor Kirk, “Labor, Vice, and Space: Mormon Hegemony and the Utah Chinese, 1869-1896” (University of Utah, 2007).

¹⁵⁶ See Larry C. Porter, “The Book of Mormon: Historical Setting for Its Translation and Publication,” Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, accessed December 15, 2012, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=22> [accessed September 23, 2013]. Acclaimed Mormon historian Donald L. Enders (1998) listed the Grandin printing building in Palmyra, New York, as one of two “significant sites of the Restoration” of the early days of Mormonism. See Donald L. Enders, “Two Significant Sites of the Restoration - Ensign Sept. 1998,” accessed September 24, 2013, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1998/09/two-significant-sites-of-the-restoration?lang=eng>.

Flake and Larry W. Draper.¹⁵⁷ Flake and Draper published in 1978 a bibliography of sources mentioning Mormonism over one hundred years, and then extended their work in a later version with a “Ten Year Supplement.” The current edition includes over 14,400 entries by or about the Church. Their intent was to cite every publication, both positive and negative, in the first century of Mormonism. This collection is now also available online from two different sources in multiple searchable formats but does not include individual articles such as those that comprise the primary sources of this dissertation.¹⁵⁸

Peter Crawley collected and annotated texts regarding Mormonism for more than two decades and made a smaller, but more descriptive annotated bibliography in which he declared: “In large part the Church is defined by [its] incunabula”—the books of its first twenty-eight years.¹⁵⁹ Crawley annotated 345 Mormon texts including pamphlets, newspapers, scripture, broadsides, books, and hymnals, as well as non-Mormon works with significant and continued mention of Mormonism. Crawley enriched his annotated bibliography with biographies of key players in Mormon and non-Mormon print. Crawley’s comprehensive identification of the foremost primary sources in Latter-day Saint printing is of inestimable worth to those studying the texts of Mormonism. The

¹⁵⁷ See Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1997); Chad J. Flake and Larry W. Draper, “A Mormon Bibliography, 1830-1930 | Religious Studies Center,” accessed September 27, 2013, <https://rsc.byu.edu/available/mormon-bibliography-1830-1930>.

¹⁵⁸ See Chad J. Flake and Larry W. Draper, “A Mormon Bibliography, 1830–1930 | Digital Collections | HBLL,” accessed September 27, 2013, http://lib.byu.edu/digital/mormon_bib/; see also Flake and Draper, “A Mormon Bibliography, 1830-1930 | Religious Studies Center.”

¹⁵⁹ Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, 1:11.

research of this dissertation expands and extends that of these authors by its collection and chronicling of thousands of newspaper sources not found in their bibliographies. It differs from those resources in content and by connecting its texts into a narrative cultural history of the agenda-setting influence reflected in the development of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1831 to 1837.

Conclusion

This dissertation is the first to conceptualize the power and influence of the volatile presence of nineteenth-century press culture and printed matter on a distinctly American institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Extant research on American, religious, print, and Mormon histories provides context but also reveals gaps that this dissertation addresses in subsequent chapters by using Mormonism as a vehicle to explore the sway of the press over time in a single religious organization via agenda-setting and vilification. The newspaper articles discovered and collected during the research for this study and their examination and discussion further fills a critical gap by using the lens of communication studies in a cultural history to see facets of American, religious, print, and communication histories not explored by others.

Chapter 3 describes the method and theories employed in the finding and analysis of the historical artifacts and offers examples of how the historical method was used in the discovery and examination of primary sources.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND THEORIES

Introduction

This dissertation employed the historical research method in crafting a cultural history of the influence of nineteenth-century American print on the trajectory of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1831 to 1837, inclusively. This chapter demonstrates the appropriateness and effectiveness of using the historical method and a cultural history for this study. It introduces and explains the theories engaged in this historical research.

Cultural History

Communication historians have increasingly applied the cultural history approach since James Carey's call for a more thoughtful writing of the "constellation of attitudes, emotions, motives, and expectations" of historical events and actors. Carey's vision of this approach is to reconstruct what historical actors *felt*, as opposed to the "moribund" chronicling of policies, facts, and organizational progression. Thus, "cultural history is not concerned merely with events but with the thought within them. [It] is, in this sense, the study of consciousness in the past." Historians using this cultural emphasis "want to show, in short, how action made sense from the standpoint of historical actors: how did it

feel to live and act in a particular period of human history?”¹⁶⁰

For example, journalism historian Susan Henry employed the cultural history approach in her study of public relations practitioner Doris Fleischman’s later years. Henry noted the voluminous research on Fleishman’s feminist independence of her early and married life. However, Henry discovered Fleishman’s untold internal dissonance in the writings and family memories of her later life. Fleishman presented herself, wrote Henry, “as much happier and more satisfied than she was—and did not write about the things in her life that really pained her.” Henry was not content with the apparent success of the publication of Fleishman’s book on domesticity reported in the research. Instead, she “rummaged” through the documents provided by Fleishman’s widower, Edward Bernays, and found “something of the price [Fleischman] paid for her nonconformity.”¹⁶¹ The scope of Henry’s cultural history took her into the thoughts, feelings, and dissatisfactions behind Fleishman’s unexpected façade. Concerning her own research experience, Henry remarked that she became “uncomfortable studying someone who progressively became less ‘independent’” than what had previously been printed. This type of inquiry offers a “ventilation” of the “presumed dullness and triviality” of historical studies.¹⁶²

Carey averred that the printed word is “a text which said something about something to someone.” He further defined journalism as “a highly particular type of

¹⁶⁰ Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” Spring 1974, 4.

¹⁶¹ Susan Henry, “Dissonant Notes of a Retiring Feminist: Doris E. Fleischman’s Later Years,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 10, no. 1 (1998): 6, 26.

¹⁶² Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” Spring 1974, 4.

consciousness, a particular organization of social experience,” and a way of “apprehending, of experiencing the world.”¹⁶³ This cultural history of the influence of print in the history of Mormonism provides insight into the relationship between people (Mormons) and some thing (the printed word) that shaped the way they lived and acted by means of printed agendas. The majority of essays on Mormonism merely use the press to “set the stage”¹⁶⁴ for other hypotheses. This dissertation, instead, engages nineteenth-century American print about and by Mormons as an “active agent”¹⁶⁵ that forcefully shaped the identities and community of the Latter-day Saints.

Lastly, James Carey, extolling the inauguration of the *Journal of Media and Religion*, asserted that, “Religion is perhaps the most neglected topic in communications; indeed, it is the most neglected topic in modern humanities and social sciences.” Carey lamented that religion has been marginalized and displaced by the “secularizing force of media.” It has been relegated to the “ghetto” of the Sunday morning religion page “merely as a public service obligation,” and has been displaced from its “historical functions” in the broader literature of media events. This undervalued treatment of religion and media constitutes “a deficiency and a neglect.” No religious phenomena, Carey affirmed, “can be understood without reference to media that organize religious community, transcribe and embed religious belief, and create both collective memory and

¹⁶³ Carey, 4–5, 27.

¹⁶⁴ See Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, “The Cultural Biography of Objects,” *World Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (October 1999): 169.

¹⁶⁵ Claire L. Lyons and John K. Papadopoulos, “Archaeology and Colonialism,” in *The Archaeology of Colonialism*, ed. Claire L. Lyons and John K. Papadopoulos (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2001), 8.

modern politics.”¹⁶⁶ This dissertation helps fill the neglect Carey regretted that displaces religion from its historical functions through its cultural history of the controversial, marginalized religion of Mormonism.

The Historical Method

Historians William David Sloan and Michael Stamm extol the capabilities of the historical method. In an academic sense, it does more than simply retell historical events; it provides a rigorous framework for understanding the past with an “intrinsic value in itself.” Employed properly, the historical method offers the ability to compare the present with the past, as opposed to merely tracing the progress from the past to the present.¹⁶⁷

Louis Gottschalk was succinct in his declaration: “History is three-dimensional.”¹⁶⁸

When engaged conscientiously and professionally, the historical method “conceptualizes the past in constant dialogue with an ever-inventing present, one that responds to questions and reveals fresh insights into the human condition.”¹⁶⁹

The historical method has its own history. The Greek historian Herodotus (ca. 485-425 BCE) began the process of distinguishing between myth and a verifiable past through a substantiation of sources. Although the rules of evidence have been modified in the centuries since, the current process of historical methodology is founded on the ideas

¹⁶⁶ James W. Carey, “Preface,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 1, no. 1 (2002): 1–3.

¹⁶⁷ Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, ix–x.

¹⁶⁸ Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), viii.

¹⁶⁹ Anthony Brundage, *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing*, 4th ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 28), 2.

of Herodotus and his many distinguished successors such as Thucydides and Polybius.¹⁷⁰

The historical method is a scholarly approach for examining all varieties of history with academically accepted processes. It is rigorous and consistent, yet affords researchers flexibility regarding where the history is found (e.g., various media such as historical documents, newspapers, photographs, or oral histories). In the millennia since its parentage, scholars have established consistent, accepted approaches of historical research, which include rigor, significance, appropriate sources, authenticity, provenance, and reliability.

Historical Method Components

Rigor

The responsibility for thorough research underpins the American Historical Association's statements on the Standards of Professional Conduct.¹⁷¹ According to the document, researchers demonstrate rigor when they acknowledge and perpetuate accurate, diligent research of primary documents. Rigor begins with topic selection. First, the researcher must have the *ability* to explore such a topic. For example, it is unlikely that a historian unable to speak German could study historical German documents effectively. Second, a topic must have *workability*. An absence or unavailability of documents germane to the subject makes the point moot. Third, the topic must be

¹⁷⁰ See Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹⁷¹ See "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct: American Historical Association," accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/governance/policies-and-documents/statement-on-standards-of-professional-conduct>.

significant, as demonstrated throughout the work. Weakness in any of these three areas reduces the rigor of a study and, likewise, its credibility.¹⁷²

Rigorous historical research must be based on primary sources with only careful inclusion of secondary sources, what Sloan and Stamm referred to as the “standard authorities.”¹⁷³ Historians recognize the danger of relying on secondary sources that cite each other because of the possibility of propagating errors in sources, accuracy, or bias. The process of discovering primary sources has opposing viewpoints. Margaret A. Blanchard and David A. Copeland advocated that researchers should study primary sources first to shape their own perception of the texts before being influenced by secondary sources.¹⁷⁴ Sloan and Stamm, however, admit that this approach is logical and laudable, but quite unfeasible. More often than not, one discovers the existence of a primary source through reviewing secondary sources.¹⁷⁵ Although the latter is acceptable, it is critical within the historical method that the primary source be accessed in every possible case to improve rigor and accuracy.

My discovery of texts began with the oft-cited newspapers used in secondary sources. It became apparent in the process of verifying these texts cited by other authors that scholars have a limited repertoire of newspaper articles on Mormonism, and mistakes in transcription, particularly of newspaper titles, have been sustained. This realization

¹⁷² See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, xi–xii.

¹⁷³ Sloan and Stamm, 51.

¹⁷⁴ See David A. Copeland, “How to Write Journalism History,” *Journalism Studies* 7, no. 3 (2006): 463–64.

¹⁷⁵ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 80, 194.

caused me to wonder if additional artifacts existed or if the quoted corpus was exhaustive. Thus began the unbelievable discovery that not just hundreds of articles have escaped scholarly review, but many thousands. These new primary sources I unearthed allowed me to verify (triangulate), rebut, and revise claims based on the narrow library of nineteenth-century commentary on Mormonism that restricts current scholarship. The continual discovery of “new” documents is thrilling for historians. My analysis of my archive of artifacts—digital copies of original sources—is building in innovative and exciting ways on previous scholarship. To guard against perpetuating errors concerning unverified and inaccessible primary sources, I either located a duplicate article in another newspaper or omitted the unsubstantiated claims.

The capabilities of software and hardware dramatically improved my ability to explore my topic and the workability of pertinent primary source documents not available to historians and scholars even a decade ago. National digitization efforts of archival documents provided the capacity to pursue my topic without the constant need to gain physical access to restricted archives or rare collections. One noteworthy example of this burgeoning electronic availability is the collection of thousands of high-resolution scans of original Mormon documents offered through the Joseph Smith Papers Project of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹⁷⁶ Many of the documents are printed in a multivolume set and online documents are available to the public without cost. The Project constitutes “an essential resource for scholars and students of the life and work of Joseph Smith, early Mormonism, and nineteenth-century American religion.”¹⁷⁷ The site

¹⁷⁶ See “The Joseph Smith Papers.”

¹⁷⁷ “Frequently Asked Questions About the Joseph Smith Papers,” s.v. What is the

provided valuable context and sources for this dissertation but does not include non-Mormon newspapers that are the primary medium for my study.

A resource more closely related to my research is a digital collection of approximately six hundred publications focused on the early years of the Book of Mormon. The Nineteenth-Century Publications about the Book of Mormon (1829-1844) website¹⁷⁸ available through Brigham Young University was “intended to comprise, insofar as possible, everything published in that time span relating to the Book of Mormon.”¹⁷⁹ The prospects of the assembled materials were exciting and the author who introduced the website in 2009, Matthew Roper, called attention to some of the sources in his essay. Yet even with the new digital accessibility, the limitations were noticeable. For example, Roper described an antagonistic view well-known by scholars that was published by editors in 1830 about the Book of Mormon and concluded, “such views were typical and were widely disseminated.”¹⁸⁰ No explanation or citations were given to support how typical the views were or how wide was the dissemination. The six hundred publications offered in the database have great value but were still woefully incomplete and led many scholars to make similar generalized claims.

The rigor and diligence to the historical method I employed in this dissertation

Joseph Smith Papers Project?, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/faq>.

¹⁷⁸ “19th-Century Publications about the Book of Mormon (1829–1844),” BYU Library, accessed January 20, 2018, <https://lib.byu.edu/collections/19th-century-publications-about-the-book-of-mormon/>.

¹⁷⁹ Matthew Roper, “Early Publications on the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 2 (2009): 39.

¹⁸⁰ Roper, 44.

allows me to disrupt such generalized declarations and unfounded conclusions by quantifying and describing important historical details such as dissemination, geographical coverage, numerical frequency, and intensity with details and insights simply not possible from smaller databases.

The distinctive artifacts I uncovered and catalogued came from multiple digitization projects around the country, which are making a host of other nearly inaccessible documents and texts available to researchers. I began the search for these databases at the J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah and then expanded my search to other universities to see what was available and accessible. I also conducted searches for newspaper resources via the Internet. Repositories such as the Harvard Brittle Book Collection, New York City Public Library, and numerous special collections of institutions large and small have allowed many of their texts to be scanned and made available to the public. I located and stored high-quality digital copies of approximately eleven thousand original newspaper pages related to the topic of this cultural history via Google Books, the National Archives, American Antiquarian Society, Open Library, Chronicling America, and various academic, philanthropic, genealogical, and for-profit institutions that have digitized early American newspapers. Despite my immense findings, the search was not exhaustive primarily for the sake of the expense of subscription costs to the databases. Although the historical method prefers a verified original document to be held in one's own hand and viewed with one's own eyes, the electronic age provides accessibility and searchability of a massive number of texts unreachable to most scholars because of location, rarity, or cost.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Historical methods scholars Sloan and Stamm have a book chapter on

I began my exploration of each new database with an electronic word search. To maximize results, I queried “Mormon*” with the trailing asterisk, which required the database to search for the word *Mormon* and any version with an added suffix, such as *Mormons*, *Mormonite*, *Mormonites*, *Mormonism*, etc. Unfortunately, this often did not bring into the results articles about Mormonism or Mormons that did not use the title. For example, a text may have been about a central figure of Mormonism but since it may not have used the word *Mormon*, did not show in the results. This was a recognized weakness, but one that posed an impractical problem of searching every database hundreds of times for as many Mormon-related names and words. Despite this disadvantage, the search for *Mormon** specifically included multiple derivations in a single search and quickly returned results numbering from fifty to three thousand matches, which after two years of constant effort numbered eleven thousand articles.

I also investigated various universities and libraries across the nation to locate nondigitized, microfilmed newspapers and requested them through interlibrary loan. With the assistance of others,¹⁸² these full runs of notable newspapers such as the vitriolic anti-Mormon *Warsaw (Il) Signal*¹⁸³ were placed into microfilm machines connected to

historical research on the Internet and include thirty-three pages of recommended historical research websites, some of which are listed above. Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, chap. 6, see, especially, pp. 159-92.

¹⁸² Please see the acknowledgments page at the beginning of this dissertation for my sincere gratitude to those who assisted in this major undertaking.

¹⁸³ Thomas Sharp, editor of the *Warsaw Signal*, was an outspoken enemy of Joseph Smith and the Mormons as a result of fears of the consolidation of power in Smith and a bloc-voting membership. It was his paper that was a key instigator in the lynching of Smith with printed words such as: “Joe Smith, is not safe out of Nauvoo, and we would not be surprised to hear of his death by violent means in a short time,” and, “CITIZENS ARISE, ONE and ALL!!! ... We have no time for comment, every man will make his own. LET IT BE MADE WITH POWDER AND BALL!!!” *Warsaw Signal*, May 29,

computers with advanced software that allowed the manual capture of newspaper images page by page. These entire newspaper sets required me to perform a thorough visual search of each column to locate any mentions of Mormonism.

This unimaginable set of artifacts required careful verification, a primary component of the historical method, that each article was actually about the Mormons (old, worn, and scratched microfilmed newspapers were frequently difficult to decipher by the human eye and electronic coding) and meticulous chronicling and storage techniques. To ensure I did not lose the list of results over the days and weeks it frequently took to examine them result-by-result and to guard against not being able to replicate the search months or years later, I converted the hundreds of webpage results into PDF files for which I established a file system. I then created a spreadsheet with columns in which to enter key biographical data such as the name of paper, date, location, editor, page, etc. Each accessible article was downloaded into a PDF file by year with a careful naming system such as “Ohio Star 1835-04-02” to allow electronic organization of the articles alphabetically and according to date.¹⁸⁴ I annotated each article in Adobe Acrobat Pro/DC and added additional columns to the spreadsheet to record information such as a simple summary, line count, tone, and topics so as to allow electronic grouping of the data and statistical analysis. The impressively dense spreadsheet has just over

1844, 2; Thomas C. Sharp, “Unparalleled Outrage at Nauvoo,” *Warsaw Signal*, June 12, 1844, 2; emphases in original.

¹⁸⁴ This is the standard for dates recommended by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). It is described and recommended by the *Chicago Manual of Style, 17th Edition*. “The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th Edition,” The Chicago Manual of Style Online, sec. 9.29, accessed January 7, 2018, <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>.

eleven thousand rows (newspapers) and 199 columns (topics). The files contain more than 69 GB of data.

Two of the categorical analyses in the spreadsheet merit further explanation as they apply to this study. First: line count. Knowing the length of an article gives valuable perspective about an editor and his agenda.¹⁸⁵ The standard journalism measurement is a column inch, a unit of space one column wide by one inch deep (or high). However, nineteenth-century newspapers came in a remarkable variety of sizes, some as large as 58 x 45 cm and with six to nine columns.¹⁸⁶ Unfortunately, digitized versions of newspapers do not always include or accurately portray newspaper dimensions. Thus, the most practical and effective method for this dissertation to supply a reference for how much text an editor spent on a topic is to use line counts. Most columns of the day were between seven to twelve words wide depending on point size. Acknowledging the slight variation in column width and size of the type, line counts give a representative length of an article regardless of the sheet size of a newspaper. In other words, the length of an article is reliably dependent on the word/line count, not the physical size of the newspaper.

Line counts pose their own difficulties, however. The quality of the print, microfilm, scan, or other medium requires estimations when text is illegible, smeared, missing, or when a newspaper was folded when scanned. Additionally, it was necessary

¹⁸⁵ Most nineteenth-century editors were male. If a female editor printed on the Mormons, such as in the case of the social reformer, freethinker, and abolitionist Francis “Fanny” Wright cited later in the dissertation, due notice is given.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, 1:262.

with exceptionally large articles covering multiple columns to count how many lines any given full column of text contained and apply it to neighboring columns instead of recounting hundreds of individual columns that might only vary in a few lines. Not all of the articles discussed in this dissertation include line counts, but when the length of an article added significance to the reason for its inclusion, it is noted as applicable. As digitization efforts and optical character recognition abilities increase with centuries-old texts, word counts can be mechanically calculated.

Next is the tone with which editors wrote and reprinted newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the editor and the impression it may have had on readers. Four repetitive tonal characteristics emerged from this in-depth analysis of the sources: critical, neutral, positive, and sympathetic.¹⁸⁷ Editors' vocabulary was a determining factor in identifying the patterns of the tones and frequency of their use. For example, a critical tone included the use of personal epithets or vilifying language. A neutral tone was illustrated by a relatively objective statement of facts. Text with a positive tone included descriptions of Mormon industry, honesty, and hospitality. And articles that were sympathetic addressed wrongs perpetrated on the Mormons. Jan Shipps, in a study of American perceptions of Mormons from 1860-1960, developed a complex system of coding content in a wide variety of periodicals. Shipp's analytics are groundbreaking. She examined and coded dozens of attributes of Mormons in the media and used a five-point attitude measurement to formulate an overall ranking of an article from very negative to

¹⁸⁷ Some articles contained elements of multiple tones. When such texts were encountered, proportions determined the categorization. For example, in the rare case an article possessed equal instances of positive and negative tones it was coded as neutral. Nevertheless, the majority of articles contained proportionally disparate or exclusive tones.

very positive.¹⁸⁸ The number of sources analyzed during the seven-year time frame of this dissertation necessitated a simpler coding method. (See Appendix for coding examples.)

Rigor is strengthened by triangulation: using multiple sources and media (e.g., photographs or oral records) to reaffirm evidence used. During my painstaking chronicling of each article I continually corroborated sources, whether electronic or physical, to assure the various types of validity necessitated by the historical method as described below. Such corroboration, an aspect of Sloan and Stamm's external and internal criticism, included comparing newspaper titles, editors, dates, formats, tone, and geographical location to ensure continuity within a newspaper or editor's writings. Newspaper names have been, as much as possible, verified and corrected using *Chronicling America*, which contains a standardized listing of American newspapers.¹⁸⁹

Nineteenth-century editors habitually shortened contemporary newspaper names or included a city or state name when there was none in the title of the newspaper. Also, frequency terms such as *daily* and *weekly* were generally ignored by editors when referring to another paper that might have both daily and weekly iterations, making it difficult, if the paper is not extant, to determine which paper it was. I spent the necessary time to ensure the identity of each newspaper and, as with the webpage results, converted

¹⁸⁸ See Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), chap. 2.

¹⁸⁹ *Chronicling America* is a digital repository of American newspapers sponsored jointly by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress. It lists biographical data for tens of thousands of newspapers from 1690 and has digital scans of many of them. It is a priceless resource of American and print history. See "Chronicling America « Library of Congress," accessed January 6, 2018, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

each webpage of biographical information into PDF and stored it in its own searchable file for long-term access to guard against the decay of webpages. My folder currently contains professionally and academically verified information on 627 newspapers from Mormonism's first fifteen years. Newspaper names that could not be verified are identified as such. It is from these resources that the more than 1,600 newspaper articles from 325 newspapers analyzed for this study were drawn.

The boon of these electronic capabilities may seem unrestrained. However, Sloan and Stamm wrote, "Historians using the Internet for research must bring the same critical faculties to evaluating sources found there as one would with traditional sources."¹⁹⁰ My knowledge of and constant vigilance against the tenuous position of the Internet in serious scholarship and its complicating factors in the accuracy of research help me avoid online research pitfalls while enabling me to take advantage of the extraordinary access to documents inaccessible for centuries.

Scope

The findings of the above-mentioned thousands of sources were constrained to a representative seven-year period of Kirtland, Ohio, from 1831 through 1837. The time frame is ideal for the research questions and theoretical lenses. By 1831, the newness of Mormonism and the Book of Mormon had made its rounds through the country, the Mormons had established themselves in their second locale of Kirtland, Ohio, and American editors had settled on and into their printed agendas on Mormonism. All four editorial tones (critical, neutral, positive, and sympathetic) were identified in the

¹⁹⁰ Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 151.

commentaries during this era, and the seven years in this scope provided for the historically beneficial aspect of change over time. Positive and negative Mormon experiences during these years forged the Mormon identity as reading Americans formed their perceptions of the individuals and entity portrayed to them set in the agendas of hundreds of editors in a combination of monthly, weekly, and daily papers.

Four Mormon newspapers were printed during this selected era in which were found printed “dialogues” between Mormon and non-Mormon editors as was typical in the print culture of the 1830s. One evidence of the influence of a printed text on a person or people is the response to the text by that person or people. Then, a measurement of the impact is how much time and effort were spent on the reply including the frequency and intensity of the replication of the rejoinder. Examples of such dialogues between editors are provided throughout the narrative chapters of the dissertation. The discovery of these varied threads in the newspaper columns within the scope of this study was fascinating beyond expectation.

Standpoint

Researchers must approach the truth as far as possible and govern themselves in the use of evidence. They are also cautioned against unrestrained generalization, regardless of the passion felt for the subject. Closely related is the frequently contested idea of *objectivity* in historical writing. Brennen and Hardt explained that historical narratives are unavoidably subjected to outside influences, particularly the personal character, biases, and feelings of the author. Responsible researchers must recognize this inevitability and not claim complete objectivity. Brennen and Hardt also cautioned that

history is a process, not a presentist tool to strengthen current hegemonies.¹⁹¹

My own relationship to this dissertation is simply stated: I am a practicing Mormon. Is it possible for me to write an objective history regarding my own beliefs? Or, does my intimate participation in the faith allow for insights not readily available to those more distant from the culture? Speaking forthrightly about “self-oblivious historical claims to being ‘objective’ or ‘disinterested,’” David Grimsted averred,

People write good history who care most about their topics and bring to them every bit of experience, passion, insight, and commitment they can muster—and who care about and are committed, in a primary way, to honesty, fairness, and deepening, and thus changing, their own understanding.¹⁹²

I made a concerted effort to be aware of my predispositions in my selection of sources, narrative, and conclusions and found great satisfaction when my findings challenged and revised my understanding and inescapable assumptions. As an emerging historian, I endeavored to maintain the professional academic standards of the historical method while allowing my passion, insight, and commitment for the topics to engage established scholars in new conversations.

Historical Understanding

A researcher must also possess a historical understanding of the topic described.¹⁹³ The culture, social pressures, influences (including political and religious), hegemonic structures, and prominent ideologies must be understood by the author to

¹⁹¹ See Brennen and Hardt, *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, 8.

¹⁹² Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, xv.

¹⁹³ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 52–53.

place the findings in an appropriate light. This is likewise true of a cultural history. The breadth of topics and sources in my reviews of literature—including Jacksonian politics, mob violence and lynching, nineteenth-century American religious movements, slavery, and journalism—enabled me to consider and present an engaging view of the social atmospheres that directed the development of Mormonism.¹⁹⁴

Authenticity, Reliability, and Validity

An inescapable responsibility of a historian is the authenticity, reliability, and validity of the documents and media used in his or her research. To ensure their trustworthiness, scholars have established both external and internal criticism of historical documents.¹⁹⁵ *External criticism* questions the validity, authenticity, and trustworthiness of a document to verify whether the document is genuine. Is it what it claims to be? Thus, the *provenance* of a document establishes the feasibility of the existence of the document. Provenance considers the contextual and circumstantial

¹⁹⁴ For example, descriptions of nineteenth-century journalism culture, editor interaction, and debate within the press helped establish socially acceptable language, expectations, reactions, and intentions of the time, which are far different from today's "politically correct" atmosphere. See Gerald J. Baldasty, "American Political Parties and the Press," in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 270–96; Hazel Dicken-Garcia, "Changes in News During the Nineteenth Century," in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 229–56; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; Brown, "The Revolution's Legacy for the History of the Book"; Frederic Hudson, "The Fourth Epoch 1783-1832," in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 61–75.

¹⁹⁵ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 200–236; see also Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, chaps. 6–7. For the purposes of this dissertation, the word "documents" in an historical sense will mean any medium used to encode history.

evidence regarding the ownership and storage of the document. It asks questions such as, Is it likely that those who claim to have owned and stored the document could actually have done so? Provenance traces the existence of the document from origination to current availability. Any break in this chain should lead to a more critical examination of the authenticity of the document.

One advantage of working with public newspapers is that hundreds and even thousands of the documents were printed as opposed to single, rare, handwritten artifacts. The mass-produced articles used in this dissertation were easier to verify through multiple copies than studies that rely on a single copy of the document. Nevertheless, newspapers pose their own needs for internal and external criticism. For example, I discovered instances where citations to and transcriptions of newspaper articles important to various historical fields were, because of inaccessibility of the primary source, regularly cited from secondary sources as if they were the primary sources. Hence, errors in transcription and misinterpretation of the original text have been perpetuated even in awarded scholarly works.

I discovered one such incorrectly cited source while examining an irregularity in a digital scan of a microfilmed newspaper. The secondary authors quoted from what appeared to be the top half of a column and then used an ellipsis to skip over what looked like a folded or smudged line across the microfilmed paper to quote from the bottom of the column. However, I could not rectify the topic nor sentence structure to my satisfaction. After many hours of careful examination and comparison to other issues within the paper, I discovered that the original newspaper page had been torn at some point in its history and the person who microfilmed it arranged two nonrelated halves of

the paper above and below each other to make it look as if it were one page. The alignment of pages along the severed lines was quite skillful. In actuality, the bottom half of the paper came from an issue that preceded the top half of the paper by two weeks. I was able to verify my conclusion by comparing the substituted half page to a full copy of the previous issue. Unless a scholar had more than the one weekly issue of the newspaper and took the time to read before and after the needed text, the error would not be and was not discovered.

This experience, in part, reaffirmed my commitment that if a text was not available to me, regardless of how many times a newspaper article was cited in reputable studies, I would either use an alternate source such as an exchange paper copy, or not use the citation despite its apparent relativity and value to my topic. Such instances are noted in my footnotes.

The experience also highlighted the following historical methods processes. For example, external criticism requires the proper *identification of the author*.¹⁹⁶ In a world of ghostwriters, scribes, anonymous contributors, pseudonyms, and forgeries, the true authorship of a document must be identified. Great errors have been perpetuated in the histories of governments, religions, and societies because words thought to be from one person turn out to be from another. *Collation* can help avoid this error. As I did with the torn newspaper page, the document must be compared to other versions of the document to expose similarities and variations. The provenance of multiple copies of a document help shed light on whether the document in question is what it claims to be by whom it

¹⁹⁶ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 201; see also Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 144–45.

claims to be written. The final characteristic of external criticism is *textual verification*.¹⁹⁷ Similar to collation, textual verification examines different documents from the same author for correlating grammar, punctuation, and writing style. Carefully tracing sentence structure and phraseology led me to insights other scholars skipped by using an ellipsis. Great effort should be extended through external criticism to ensure that the document is genuine.

Newspaper editors of the nineteenth century regularly printed editorials without a printed signature or reprinted texts without an attribution to the original source. In further demonstration of rigor, I am careful to not attribute authorship of an editorial even if the author seemed apparent. This was of importance to this study when quoting Mormon papers “edited” by Smith. He was listed as editor of multiple papers but scholars debate the degree of his involvement. Thus, my citations reflect a conscious consideration when an author was or was not listed.

Once a document is believed to be genuine, it must also be subjected to *internal criticism*.¹⁹⁸ Internal criticism establishes the credibility, accuracy, and reliability of a document. First, there must be *independent corroboration*. Do outside texts confirm the existence of the document? Do they strengthen the probability that such a document or author actually existed and had reason to be created? Second, one must examine the *credibility of the author*. What was the author’s motive for recording the historical event? Were there ulterior motives for what was documented and how it was recorded? Did the

¹⁹⁷ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 201.

¹⁹⁸ See Sloan and Stamm, 210–36; see also Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, chap. 7.

author have proximity both in time and space to the event? What was the availability of the evidence described? Did the author have the appropriate expertness to detail the event with accuracy? What was the purpose of the document? Does it report hearsay, inferential, or circumstantial evidence? These questions serve to clarify the author as a credible witness or transcriber of the historical event.

These elements are particularly relevant to newspaper editors who may have picked up the story from the exchange a thousand miles away or who might have written the original only miles from their Mormon subject. Articles written near the source tended to be longer and more detailed. As they traveled through dozens of exchange papers and hundreds of miles, it was apparent that the replicating editors reduced the text for the sake of column space or what he or she desired to cause local readers to know or think. Careful attention to spelling and misspellings, particularly of names, made it possible to trace the source of the text through its journey across the country.

Another aspect must also be employed to verify the authenticity of a document: *source credibility*.¹⁹⁹ Just as first-hand accounts are superior to second-hand accounts, the time lapse between the documentation of an event and the event itself must be identified. When it comes to time lapse, the sooner the document is written after the occurrence, the better. Records written decades or centuries after an event will contain altered details from those recorded immediately following an event. There are, however, exceptions to these guidelines. If no primary sources exist (e.g., as a result of archival difficulties, natural disasters, or cultures or events without written records), then any extant records

¹⁹⁹ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 211; see also Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, 66–68.

may serve as primary sources as long as the researcher identifies the circumstances. Additionally, if a scholar is using a qualitative approach by examining the *author* of a text, the context surrounding the documentation is the concern, not the event documented. Thus, a record separated even by centuries from an event could be considered a primary source depending on what aspect is being interrogated. All but a few of my sources were written within the time frame chosen for this dissertation; for those that were not, I was cautious and judicious and recognized potential problems in the footnotes.

Source credibility also considers the *confidential nature* of a document.²⁰⁰ Journals or personal letters are more reliable because the intended audience is smaller and less likely to react to failings of the author. People tend to hesitate to expose their weaknesses to larger audiences, thus affecting the credibility of more-public records. Similarly, source credibility also examines the *purpose* of what was written. Is it a public or government document? Was it written for a newspaper and/or subjected to editing or oversight? Using the established criteria of external and internal criticism, and source credibility enabled me to ensure the authenticity, reliability, and credibility of the documents used.

The use of newspapers as the central artifacts in this dissertation might appear to be an obvious instance that the texts were inherently not confidential in nature. And, in fact, according to the premise of Agenda Setting Theory, the articles discovered in my research were boldly intended to be spread abroad with specific purposes. However,

²⁰⁰ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 213–29; see also Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 93–114.

nineteenth-century editors were as apt to publish confidential texts as their modern counterparts. In such instances in this dissertation, I expended careful effort to verify and compare the unintended published document with the confidential source, when available, to be able to accurately assess the atmosphere and intent surrounding the publication.

The last component of internal criticism pertains to my own *contextual understanding*.²⁰¹ Are there archaic language or technical terms that will lead to incorrect conclusions about the event? Historians need to remind themselves of the possibility of the shift in definitions over time. I made frequent use of the Oxford English Dictionary to ensure my comprehension of nineteenth-century American vocabulary was accurate and I included appropriate definitions in the footnotes to increase readers' understanding.

Finally, as is common in historical writing, I used the *Chicago Manual of Style, 17th Edition*, style of historical writing to avail this study of the advantages of using detailed footnotes, which allow for greater rigor and an increased opportunity for contextual explanations.²⁰² Footnotes allow the author to anticipate readers' questions and address them. More importantly, footnotes provide an opportunity, according to the American Historical Association's statement on Standards of Professional Conduct, to give generous acknowledgment to intellectual debts. They also create a clear trail for other researchers to follow when conducting their own studies. Using footnotes in my

²⁰¹ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 211–12; see also Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, 43.

²⁰² See Jane Marcellus, "Our Citation Style Matters," *Clio Among the Media*, Fall 2009.

explications of American and LDS Church history enabled me to include additional supporting evidence,²⁰³ which strengthened my efforts to apply James Carey's call to establish the thoughts, feelings, and intents behind the events or people I described.²⁰⁴

Theory

The use of theory in historical works remains a contested topic and historians are divided as to what degree of the use of theory is appropriate in history.²⁰⁵ Different from the purposes of historical studies, theories are used in social science research to identify past trends and predict future movements. This top-down approach concerns historians for its ability to drive outcomes.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, scholars remain who see value in organizing and examining historical findings into theoretical groupings. John Nerone criticized historians who abandon theory in the “unattainable ideal” of placing history in its own time and place.²⁰⁷ History is better understood, agreed Barbara Friedman et al., through the clearer perception theory provides.²⁰⁸ Conversely, Michael Schudson maintained that history can only be interpreted when placed in its own context of cultural

²⁰³ For a warning concerning the possibility of “abusing” footnotes, see Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 20–21.

²⁰⁴ See Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” Spring 1974, 4.

²⁰⁵ See Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 250.

²⁰⁶ See Kathy Roberts Forde, “What We Talk about When We Talk about Theory,” *Clio Among the Media*, Autumn 2013, 3.

²⁰⁷ John Nerone, “Theory and History,” in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 36.

²⁰⁸ See Barbara Friedman et al., “Stirred, Not yet Shaken: Integrating Women’s History into Media History,” *American Journalism* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 160–74.

and social influences, not in modern structures of theoretical perception.²⁰⁹ Researchers on this side of the debate feel history is not merely a linguistic construction to be examined with presentist theoretical lenses.

Other scholars have identified yet another complicating factor of using theory in historical works. For example, Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, Carl Kaestle, and Chris Daly believed that the borrowing of theories from other disciplines places communication history in a scavenging, secondary position, depleting communication history of credibility.²¹⁰ And then there are those who sanction the use of theory in historical writing, but only on a limited basis. Thus, David Spencer declared that theory should only be used when it is obviously relevant,²¹¹ and Jim McPherson said with tongue-in-cheek that theory may have uses in history, “but not many.”²¹² Sloan and Stamm supported this approach with their explanation that theory has a more “elastic” use in history than in other social science research. Yet others described the role of theory in history as “bottom-up”: writing the history first, and then seeing if a theoretical

²⁰⁹ See Michael Schudson, “A Revolution in Historiography?,” in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 46–50.

²¹⁰ See, respectively, Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, chap. 4; Carl F. Kaestle, “Standards of Evidence in Historical Research: How Do We Know When We Know?,” *History of Education Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 361–66; Daly, “The Historiography of Journalism History: Part 1: ‘An Overview.’”

²¹¹ See David R. Spencer, “To Theorize or Not to Theorize,” *American Journalism* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 141–45.

²¹² See Jim McPherson, “Theory in History May Have Its Uses—But Not Many,” *American Journalism* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 137–39.

framework can be used to explain what was discovered.²¹³

Agenda Setting Theory

One theory employed in this dissertation to elucidate the power of the printed word is Agenda Setting Theory, formalized in the 1970s by scholars Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw. Summarizing their findings of a twentieth-century political campaign study, McCombs and Shaw declared:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.... The mass media may well determine the important issues—that is, the media may set the “agenda” of the campaign.²¹⁴

In a more extensive examination decades later, McCombs cautioned that Agenda Setting Theory is not a return to a “hypodermic needle” view of the effect of media—that whatever media broadcast is immediately and effectively implemented by recipients who are brainwashed with no agency or application of critical analysis.²¹⁵ Instead, Agenda Setting recognizes that “the mass media force attention to certain issues ... constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about.”²¹⁶ The public, therefore, perceives a correlated degree of importance on an issue formulated by the emphasis it receives over time in the media.

²¹³ Sloan and Stamm, *Historical Methods in Communication*, 250, 253.

²¹⁴ Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 176.

²¹⁵ See Maxwell McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Inc., 2011), 6.

²¹⁶ McCombs and Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media,” 177.

McCombs called the perception of reality portrayed by media a “second-hand reality,” one structured by the choices of media constructors (e.g., reporters, editors, studios, owners, conglomerates) in their decisions of what to report, with what frequency, how it is to be framed, what visibility it will be assigned (e.g., front page, above the fold), and its duration over time.²¹⁷ Directly applicable to this dissertation’s study of burgeoning Mormonism in Ohio is McCombs’s observation that Agenda Setting is most potent in “the early formative stages of public opinion when the issues emerge and first engage public attention.” McCombs termed this the “need for orientation.”²¹⁸ Americans’ need for orientation about the new body and belief of Mormonism made them particularly susceptible to what the primary national medium, newspapers, said about the adherents.

Agenda Setting in a Historical Context

Those living in the 1800s made frequent and consistent comments about their firsthand observations of the power and influence of the press around them, or, more specifically, the power wielded by those who controlled the dissemination of information. For example, Tocqueville’s investigation into American democracy often drifted to discourses on the American press—something he did not anticipate during his visit. He was astounded that “in America there is scarcely a hamlet which has not its own

²¹⁷ McCombs’s later studies developed into multilevel agenda setting observations and included descriptions of the strength and span of a given media effect. Of necessity in a historical examination, this dissertation delimits the more specified derivations of Agenda Setting Theory applied in the social sciences.

²¹⁸ McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*, 20. McCombs’s correlations are sufficiently strong for him to warn journalists about their inescapable ethical responsibility for careful selection and repetition of issues.

newspaper.”²¹⁹ Tocqueville’s marveling then turned to analysis: “Nothing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same moment.... To suppose that [newspapers] only serve to protect freedom would be to diminish their importance: they *maintain civilization*.”²²⁰

Conversely, other eyewitnesses, even editors themselves, lamented the disintegration of American civilization at the hands of editors. Federalist editor John Ward Fenno castigated in 1799:

The newspapers of America are admirably calculated to keep the country in a continual state of insurrection and revolution.... The American newspapers are the most base, false, servile, and venal publications that ever polluted the fountains of society—their editors are the most ignorant, mercenary automatons that ever were moved by the continually rusting wires of sordid mercantile avarice.²²¹

Whether Americans of the early 1800s viewed the press in a positive or negative light, it was obvious to them that newspapers efficiently set the agenda of the public mind.

Agenda Setting and Mormonism

The body of Mormon adherents increased from 1831 to 1837 into a noticeable and notable American populace during which time Mormon and non-Mormon editors positioned themselves and promoted their agendas of what they intended readers to think

²¹⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, Esq., vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1875), 185.

²²⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, Esq., vol. 2 (New York: J. & H. G. Langley, 1840), 119; emphasis added.

²²¹ Gazette of the United States, March 4, 1799, quoted in Walt Brown, “The Federal Era III: Scissors, Paste, and Ink,” in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 121.

about regarding Mormon spiritual beliefs and physical congregating. Agenda Setting Theory helped clarify this phenomenon. Smith learned early to be wary of the problematic potential of nineteenth-century print.²²² During the Ohio years, the potency of what American editors caused to be read and discussed about Mormonism can be seen, in part, by Smith's preoccupation with correcting the resulting image of Mormonism by setting his own agenda of what he wanted readers to think.

As Smith and the Mormons moved to Ohio and sunk their seven-year roots, Smith wasted no time in establishing the first Mormon presses to practice and promulgate his Mormon agendas, which included: spreading revealed Mormon doctrine; standardizing the developing Mormon church and leadership structure; unifying Mormon identity; and answering and counteracting what was being printed about them. During these seven years, commentary in the American press exploded with over 1,600 articles that addressed the growing faith. Smith's late arrival on the printing scene in 1832 and Mormon inexperience with the volatile nature of the printed word placed them in a frustrating disadvantage to editors who had already been printing about them for approximately four years. Mormons massing in Ohio faced a new era in their developing history. Mere disbelief and caustic commentary evolved into brutal, organized mob violence while, at the same time, thousands found reasons to believe and gather with the Mormon body.

The study of the newspaper artifacts from 1831 to 1837 exposed the most

²²² This was the theft of the first 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon as related in the introduction of Chapter 1. The perpetrators apparently intended to alter the manuscript and publish it thereby intending the incongruities with Smith's version to destroy the credibility of both the Book of Mormon and its translator.

recurring Mormon topics in papers across the country, the editorial tone used while writing about such news, which agenda each served, the number of times identical or similar texts were reprinted in the nineteenth-century newspaper exchange, the dispersion and geographical reach of readers in the United States, and the Mormon reaction and agenda in their own newspapers. Among the most frequent, widespread, and replicated topics were Mormon fanaticism and elitism, political power, economic pressures (both anticipated potential and depressing poverty), gathering, miracles (and failed attempts), and treachery. The replication of these topics revealed six non-Mormon agendas: Mormon dishonesty, criminality, fanaticism, credulity and gullibility, power, and vilification. Likewise, four Mormon agendas were evident: to dispel, correct, or offset misperceptions; relay church doctrines and structures; unify scattered members; and portray a persecuted people. Agenda Setting Theory helped examine and elucidate these agendas non-Mormon and Mormon editors placed before readers on the pages of their papers and the effects of the implied degree of importance their repetition caused.

Vilification Theory

Marsha Vanderford Doyle²²³ adapted University of Pittsburgh Professor of Rhetorical Theory Otis M. Walter's studies on Motivation to formulate a process of creating a social enemy. "Vilification," she defined,

is a rhetorical strategy that discredits adversaries by characterizing them as ungenuine and malevolent advocates. Rather than differentiating opponents as good people with a difference of opinion, vilification delegitimizes them through

²²³ Marsha Vanderford Doyle wrote under this name for her University of Minnesota dissertation in 1982. By 1989 she had dropped the surname *Doyle* and published as Marsha Vanderford in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. For simplicity, she will be referred to by her later published name, Vanderford.

characterizations of intentions, actions, purposes, and identities.²²⁴

The strategy has four lineal stages. First is *Identification of the Enemy*. “Identification of the enemy unifies individuals, provides a clear target for movement action, and allows activists to define themselves and their positions in opposition to those of their adversaries.” Such identification includes specific vernacular, terminology, and ideological terms, as well as names assigned to both sides of the conflict. This “etymological posturing” facilitates the exclusion and belittling of the opposition.

Second is *Portrayal of the Adversary*. Closely related to the previous step of Identification is the “portrayal of the adversary as a corrupt and amoral individual [allowing] activists to define himself or herself as a moral agent fighting against evil. The darkly painted foe also provides a target for emotional catharsis.” Founded on Walter’s “Barrier Situation,” portrayal of the adversary is the beginning of specifying harms—real or imagined—to justify counteraction.

The third stage is *Attributing Diabolical Motives*. “By describing the opponents as threatening the basic needs and values of the members of the movement,” Vanderford explained, “vilification creates the need for self-defense and increases commitment to the cause.” In this stage, the barrier agent, according to Walter, must be perceived as diabolical and intent on injuring those with whom we identify ourselves, particularly family or friends, home and country, or social class including religion. This third stage is essential in its ability to cast the opposite viewpoint as a destructive opponent instead of worthy individuals concerned about a social problem. This attribution includes “flagrant

²²⁴ Marsha L. Vanderford, “Vilification and Social Movements: A Case Study of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75, no. 2 (1989): 166.

generalizations to larger groups” and establishes the need for attack against persons instead of problems or laws.

Fourth and last is *Magnifying the Opponent’s Power*. The final classification carefully empowers “an enemy with the means to achieve heinous goals, [which] provides a reason for alarm and action.” The threat must be unscrupulous, immoral, and merciless. Nevertheless, the strength of an opponent’s power is a skillful negotiation. A sufficiently weak foe does not merit the effort required to subvert it; on the other hand, an adversary too powerful for the chance of success likewise does not justify an expenditure of fruitless energy. The maximum effect is when supporters can be rallied to fight the mammoth, but conquerable foe.²²⁵

The discovery of vilification efforts of one agent in an oppositional relationship is further confirmed by findings of vilification strategies of the other. It becomes the binary battle of good and evil, truth and error, freedom and enslavement, and knowledge and ignorance, with no middle ground for compromise. It is seen in many aspects of life including, as studied by Vanderford, prolife and prochoice rhetoric, politics, economics, and religion—including the introduction of Mormonism on the pages of the nineteenth-century press. These vilifying steps were an effective means to remove the face of individuality from Mormons and create a faceless, ominous Mormonism that merited extermination without the burden of conscience.

²²⁵ Vanderford, 166–82; Marsha Vanderford Doyle, “In-House Rhetoric of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Special Interest Groups in Minnesota: Motivation and Alienation” (University of Minnesota, 1982); Otis M. Walter, “Toward an Analysis of Motivation,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 41, no. 3 (October 1955): 271–78.

Conclusion

The critical examination mandated by the historical method of the authenticity and genuineness of documents is a central concern, particularly in LDS history where authenticated documents are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars and upon which a faith community is built. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reeled in the late 1980s from a historical forgery that struck at its core beliefs.²²⁶ The events left an indelible impression on Mormon history scholars and reaffirmed the difficulty of working with historical artifacts.

For communication historians who strive for academic excellence, the historical method is the first line of defense against those who would criticize the field. For my study, the historical method provided an academically sound framework for identifying and using primary historical sources, which, for this dissertation, necessitated the discovery, content review, categorization, and storage of more than 1,600 newspaper pages.

A cultural history employing the historical method was ideal for my examination of how nineteenth-century American print created, shaped, changed, and directed LDS Church history. The cultural history cast the printed artifacts in a compelling narrative

²²⁶ For example, Mark Hofmann was a forger convicted of murder and has been serving a life sentence since 1988 in the Utah State Prison. His forgeries included some American history documents but dealt primarily with Mormon history. Some of the documents he claimed to have found concerning Joseph Smith and LDS Church history contradicted core beliefs in Mormonism and many lay members, church authorities, scholars, and historians struggled to rectify the inconsistencies. After his deception was uncovered, the Church formulated a series of symposiums to “unravel” the Hofmann case. Many of the foremost Mormon and non-Mormon scholars participated and answered questions such as, “Why were scholars misled?” and, “What can we learn from this?” See *Hofmann Forgery Church History Symposium*, VHS, 11 vols. (Provo, UT, 1989).

and places readers in a position where they can almost imagine standing on a distant street corner searching the paper for the latest information on the mysterious Mormons. I constantly found myself in this study anticipating the next installment in an editor's string of articles wanting to know what happened next as if the nearly two-century gap between me and the historical actors was merely the weekly lapse between newspaper issues. The fact that I already knew what would happen only intensified my feelings as I discovered the depth of influences that led to the events that are now history.

Agenda Setting and Vilification theories grouped and clarified those influences and identified patterns used in the newspapers to describe events and people. The theories also illuminated a methodical set of tactics editors used to set the agenda for what they wanted readers to think about regarding the philosophically created entity. The compatibility and multitonal effects of the historical method, cultural history, and the theories make this dissertation a fascinating consideration of new findings that challenge and revise previous assumptions about the Mormon Kirtland experience.

Chapter 4 establishes the context of Joseph Smith's Mormonism and places the forming society in the turmoil and potential of nineteenth-century America. Mormons had witnessed the translation of what remains the only book claimed to be scripture comparable to the Bible and proved their belief by leaving home and family for a more-than-260-mile trek to the Ohio and an unknown township called Kirtland. Editors throughout the country were poised to document and interpret it all for their readers.

CHAPTER 4

MORMONISM ON THE AMERICAN SCENE

*Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations,
and where is our religion? We have none.
Joseph Smith Jr.*²²⁷

Introduction

“A marvelous feast for the credulous has recently appeared in the state of New York in the shape of a ‘golden bible,’” the *Philadelphia Mechanics Free Press* observed in May 1830. The concerned editor continued,

Who would think of finding a believer in mysterious stories at the present day, especially in this land of letters! It certainly appears absurd, but it is nevertheless true, that many people are so credulous as to believe what is too garish to be understood, in preference to plain facts, which are established by common sense and daily observation.²²⁸

Such absurdity was inconceivable. It was the age of reason, as Thomas Paine had declared. Nineteenth-century America was the most literate nation in the world and Freethought²²⁹ and freedom of religion were breaking the chains of old-world orthodoxy.

²²⁷ Joseph Smith Jr., “Minute Book 1” (Kirtland, OH, April 21, 1834), 44, The Joseph Smith Papers; capitalization modernized.

²²⁸ “Fanaticism and Ignorance Go Hand in Hand,” *Mechanic’s Free Press*, May 8, 1830, col. f; italics in original.

²²⁹ The American Freethought Movement can be traced to Europe’s Age of Enlightenment and its revolutions in science, philosophy, politics, and society. Informed by Deism, a belief in God but not the divinity of Jesus, freethought came to include atheism, rationalism, and secular humanism. Proponents approached “truth,” in any of its

Yet from the wells of populism were springing up converts to new faiths. Among these religious revisionists, a “Mr. Somebody who could neither read nor write” discovered “golden plates ... [and] was found able to translate them, and somebody else, equally ignorant, to transcribe them, and a worthy, honest but credulous farmer was found willing to be ruined by defraying the expense of publishing the *Book of Mormon*” from them.²³⁰ The words echoed from page to page across the country via the newspaper exchange like a drip in a pond, changing and shaping as they went.²³¹

Thus began Mormonism—born on the frames of the printing press, and thereon criticized, perpetuated, persecuted, unified, and exploded across thousands of pages of print over its birth and adolescence. Printers of the age recognized the power of the printed word and often boasted of its ability to shape the public mind. One such Boston newspaperman declared in 1826 at the anniversary celebration of the Franklin Typographical Society that newspapers were more than just “eminently useful.” They are now, he exulted, “considered among the necessities of life.” They are “the first thing called for in the morning and the last laid aside at night. They exert a controlling

embodiments including religion, with critical skepticism. For more information, see Marshall G. Brown and Gordon Stein, *Freethought in the United States: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978); Albert Post, *Popular Freethought in America, 1825-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).

²³⁰ “Book of Mormon,” *Rochester Republican*, December 28, 1830; italics in original.

²³¹ Antebellum newspaper editors exchanged their papers with each other with little or no cost through the United States postal service—courtesy of the Post Office Act of 1792. This system allowed national news to be disseminated throughout the new Republic and for noteworthy local news to spread beyond its hometown origin. At a time when the early United States was less than united, the intent was to increase nationalism through the spread of unifying news. See Schwarzlose, *The Nation’s Newsbrokers*, 1:4–7; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 226–27.

influence on public opinion, and decide almost all questions of a public nature.”²³²

Historians today have established the veracity of such claims. Journalism historian Stephen Botein wrote that “the press had become capable at once of greater good and more serious mischief, depending on the perspective of readers,” than ever before.²³³ Joseph Smith’s Mormonism felt the full sway of this printed power driven by editors’ agendas from his arrival on the American printing scene in 1829 with the Book of Mormon to his murder fifteen years later in 1844.

This chapter establishes nineteenth-century American culture into which Mormonism was born, including the powerful revivalism of the Second Great Awakening and the explosion of American printing in the epoch of early First Amendment experimentation. It introduces Smith via his own printed history and summarizes his early visions, the discovery, translation, and publication of the gold plates, and the resulting published reactions. And it sets the stage for the Mormons to make their first mass move to create a religious utopia in Kirtland, Ohio, from 1831 to 1837, the focus of this dissertation.

²³² Jefferson Clark, *Address Delivered at the Anniversary Celebration of the Franklin Typographical Society* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1826), 14.

²³³ Stephen Botein, “Printers and the American Revolution,” in *The American Journalism History Reader*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 76.

Setting the Stage

Early Nineteenth-Century America

America's "national adolescence" was watched with great interest on the world stage.²³⁴ Immigrants to the New World had brought with them deep-seeded "cultural baggage"²³⁵ and by the 1800s Americans were providing an "often raucous spectacle of American democracy [that] fascinated the world."²³⁶ Citizens of the new republic rejoiced in their recently formalized freedoms, and the country's prospects appeared limitless. Americans "tried on new faiths, new institutions, new symbolic systems and political identities," historian Brendan McConville observed.²³⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson described the canvas on which his generation painted:

It seems so easy for America to inspire and express the most expansive and humane spirit; new-born, free, healthful, strong, the land of the laborer, of the democrat, of the philanthropist, of the believer, of the saint, she should speak for the human race. It is the country of the Future.²³⁸

Reflecting the freshness of America's potential, Emerson's lecture to the Mercantile Library Association in Boston was titled "The Young American." The multitude of

²³⁴ David M. Kennedy, "Editor's Introduction," in *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, by Daniel Walker Howe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), xiii.

²³⁵ Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*, xiii.

²³⁶ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, xiv.

²³⁷ McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776*, 311.

²³⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, New and Revised ed., vol. 1 (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1875), 201; capitalization in original.

choices seemed unbounded in this “country of beginnings, of projects, of designs, and expectations.”²³⁹

Inventions of the first half of the nineteenth century included: Eli Whitney’s improvements on the cotton gin with standardized, interchangeable parts; Cyrus McCormick’s reaper; John Deere’s steel plow; the sewing machine; the mass production of shoes including distinguishing between the left and right shoe; Charles Goodyear’s process of vulcanizing rubber; sulfur friction matches called “locofocos” or “lucifers”; the specialization of locomotives and railroads; practical improvements on the piano; and Morse’s electric telegraph.²⁴⁰ Moreover, the golden age of American literature also dawned in the nineteenth century. Emerson’s compatriots included Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., Edgar Allen Poe, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Frederick Douglass, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Catharine Sedgwick, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Louisa May Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and Elizabeth Peabody.²⁴¹ In the larger cultural world, Mozart’s life was cut short in 1791, but succeeding composers such as Joseph Haydn (d. 1809), Beethoven (d. 1827), and Frederic Chopin (d. 1849) felt his shadow in their own works. The ever-quickenning pace of America in the 1800s spawned unprecedented achievements while at the same time increased the momentum toward cataclysmic battles over the moral hypocrisy of

²³⁹ Emerson, 1:201.

²⁴⁰ See Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 532–38, 546, 563, 642.

²⁴¹ See Gross, “Editor’s Introduction,” 55; Green, “The Rise of Book Publishing,” 124, 359; Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, 64; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 618, 623, 632, 634, 636, 643.

slavery.

Although ideologically Edenic, life in nineteenth-century America was, realistically, dirty, toilsome, smelly, disease-ridden, and uncomfortable. Most Americans were farmers and few waking hours were occupied with anything different from farming.²⁴² The population was, nevertheless, impressively mobile. “The new America was a society of movement, expansion, and change,” wrote Don Harrison Doyle.²⁴³ It was an age of democratic revolutions that “unfolded with awesome moment for people of every social rank.”²⁴⁴ The destiny of America held great portent and Americans felt it. Sociologist Armand Mauss explained that historical actors typically are unaware of changing historical stages nor do they have a sure knowledge of the consequences of contemporary events.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, historian Nathan Hatch observed that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans “of all ranks sensed that events of truly apocalyptic significance were unfolding before their eyes.” The collective and individual choices and actions of the exploding populous “seemed so far outside the range of ordinary experience that people rushed to biblical prophecy for help to understand the troubled

²⁴² Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 19, 32.

²⁴³ Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois 1825-70* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 1. Pulitzer Prize-winning nineteenth-century America historian Daniel Walker Howe wrote, “The early nineteenth century witnessed a population movement of stunning magnitude.” Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 140.

²⁴⁴ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 6.

²⁴⁵ See Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*, 78.

times that were upon them.”²⁴⁶

Revolutions in Religion

Tightly intertwined with the democratic revolution was the democratization and commodification of religion. Bewildering to nations and empires, a nation had unshackled itself from state-regulated religious practice. Americans now exulted in the Bill of Rights and the First Amendment that proclaimed: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Americans intended to experiment with their religious freedoms that made worship “purely voluntary.” This resulted in “liberating powerful religious energies ... reinvigorated and reawakened” from colonial times.²⁴⁷ The application of religious freedom, however, was messy—and the world was watching. Foreign visitors, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, were struck with the force of the unfamiliar democratic religiosity. “The Americans,” he penned, “combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other.” Astounded by the throngs of missionaries sent by nearly every denomination, Tocqueville declared: “Thus religious zeal is perpetually stimulated in the United States by the duties of patriotism.”²⁴⁸

Belief options multiplied in the free-market religious environment, and with the

²⁴⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 184, 6.

²⁴⁷ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 165.

²⁴⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 329, 330.

ever-expanding choice of religions the numbers of individual believers, congregations, and church buildings erupted. As the American population more than tripled from 7.2 million in 1810 to 23.2 million in 1850, churches were built at the rate of a thousand per year.²⁴⁹ The dawning of the Second Great Awakening spread over the country by virtue of the rays of religious publications that were printed by the tens of thousands. Despite the logical reasonings of the irreligious,²⁵⁰ believers felt it their duty to hasten the Second Coming of Christ by holding up the divinely sanctioned freedom of religion and its supporting form of popular government as an example to the world.

Joseph Smith Jr., Founder of Mormonism

Introduction

Joseph Smith Jr. was born into this world of an “unknowable future” where “Americans struggled with their unbound passions”²⁵¹ in Sharon, Vermont, on December 23, 1805. He was the fourth son of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith. Multiple crop

²⁴⁹ See Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 186; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 270.

²⁵⁰ Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason* still saw wide circulation in the first half of the 1800s, spurring the counterculture of Deism and Freethought during the era of revivalism. Its effect was sufficiently concerning for those like Elias Boudinot to pose printed rebuttals such as *The Age of Revelation*. See Elias Boudinot, *The Age of Revelation or the Age of Reason Shewn to Be An Age of Infidelity* (Philadelphia: Asbury Dickens, 1801), ix–xx; see also Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*, 64.

²⁵¹ McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776*, 311.

and business failures in Vermont and New Hampshire motivated the Smith family to join the throngs of the “Great Migration,”²⁵² lured ever westward by advertisements of fertile soil and the hope for a higher standard of living. The Smiths eventually arrived in the frontier town of Palmyra, New York, in 1816, where Joseph Smith’s adolescent feelings were shaped by hard work, family sorrows, and financial disappointment.²⁵³ The country was still afflicted by the aftermath of the War of 1812, and the financial depression that descended on the country exacerbated the already difficult frontier life. The Smith family toiled to purchase their own farm; cleared timber; hired out; dug wells; peddled sweets; made sugar, molasses, and maple syrup from their sugar trees; and joined others looking for lost mines and other buried treasure.²⁵⁴ Daniel Walker Howe, Pulitzer prize-winning scholar of nineteenth-century America, marked Smith’s background as “perfectly ordinary, even humble.”²⁵⁵

The Smith family most likely celebrated with other townsfolk the arrival of the Erie Canal. The canal, finished to Palmyra in 1822 and completed in 1825, ran along one

²⁵² Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 140.

²⁵³ See Larry C. Porter, “A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831” (Brigham Young University, 1971), 5–9.

²⁵⁴ Smith later wrote of this time, “being in indigent circumstances [we] were obliged to labour hard for the support of a large Family having nine children and ... it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family.” Joseph Smith Jr., “History, circa Summer 1832” 1832, 1, The Joseph Smith Papers. See also Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 41–43, 45.

²⁵⁵ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 313.

end of Main Street, increased commercial prospects, and connected Palmyra to the larger civilized world.²⁵⁶ Palmyra was proud of its many newspapers,²⁵⁷ the Franklin House and Eagle Hotel, Egbert B. Grandin's state-of-the-art printing press and bookstore located in a handsome new building complex, the town band, fine timber and Perry and Mason's lumberyard, and its variety of other shops, stores, and businesses.²⁵⁸

Western New York, including Palmyra, had also been set ablaze with the "roaring evangelical revivals" kindled during the Second Great Awakening.²⁵⁹ Charles Finney disapprovingly declared it "a burnt district."²⁶⁰ Whether the "western phrase," as he called it, referred to a biblical baptism by fire or the profligate frontier practice of burning away trees and growth to clear fields, the spiritually burned-over ground initiated a new life for the young Joseph Smith Jr., one that would end at age thirty-eight in a martyr's (or juggler's) death.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ Palmyra citizen Orsamus Turner claimed it was impossible to convey "an adequate impression of the joyous spirit that predominated" during the building and at the completion and dedication of the Erie Canal. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps & Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1852), 580, 581–82.

²⁵⁷ Publisher T. C. Strong debuted his *Palmyra Register* in 1817, which was renamed over the years to the *Western Farmer* (1821-1822) and *Palmyra Herald and Canal Advertiser* (1822-1823); *Wayne Sentinel* (1823); Luther Howard's *Western Spectator and Wayne Advertiser* and *Western Spectator & Anti-Masonic Star* printed in 1830 and 1831, respectively; the *Palmyra Freeman* (1828); and the *Reflector* (1829).

²⁵⁸ Fascinating details about nineteenth-century towns and cities can be gleaned from the advertisements found on the pages of its newspapers, as was the case with this information drawn from Palmyra papers of the time.

²⁵⁹ Kennedy, "Editor's Introduction," xiv.

²⁶⁰ Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney Written by Himself* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1876), 78.

²⁶¹ More than once was Smith referred to as a "juggler" in antebellum

The Early Visions of Joseph Smith Jr.

The reader is reminded that the intent of the author of this dissertation is not to offer a historical retelling of Mormon history, but to present a cultural history of Mormonism as found in newspapers that identifies the power of agenda setting in the press to shape public opinion and elicit reactions from those involved. The concern is not whether the events did actually happen or which account is most accurate; instead, it examines concepts such as: What was printed about the events and how often? How was the retelling manipulated? What indications are there that the editors' agendas had an impact? And, what were the resultant actions? Simply stated, this study is not intended to discover what was historically true, but to categorize what was set by editors to be true and to determine the reactions. Thus, Smith's first visions are summarized as they appeared in Mormon and non-Mormon newspapers.

The "First Vision"

Antebellum America was a land of seekers. Europe's religious orthodox elitism was revolting to the constitutionally freed people, yet the overwhelming number of factions in the marketplace of faith boggled minds and testimonies. Smith, and an untold number of others, were on a quest to discover God's authorized establishment.²⁶² Smith

newspapers. See, for example, "Mormonism," *Ohio Observer*, August 11, 1836, 1. The term meant "one who works marvels by the aid of magic or witchcraft, a magician, wizard, sorcerer; one who plays tricks by sleight-of-hand; a performer of legerdemain; a conjurer; one who deceives by trickery." "Juggler," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017), <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/view/Entry/101956?redirectedFrom=Juggler> (accessed May 26, 2015).

²⁶² For example, Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834) lamented, "Alas, I felt like one wandering and benighted in an unknown wilderness, who wants both light and a guide. The bible was like a sealed book; so mysterious I could not understand it.... I frequently

recalled, “At about the age of twelve years my mind become seriously imprest with regard to all the important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul.”²⁶³ The tumultuous spiritual waters were agonizing for the adolescent Smith and “the contentions and divisions, the wickedness and abominations, and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind,” caused his mind to become “exceedingly distressed.”²⁶⁴ Two years later and all the more unsatisfied with the tangled webs of local clerics as to which church was God’s own, Smith had confidence in the declaration of James who exhorted, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth unto all men liberally and upbraideth not and it shall be given him.”²⁶⁵

wished I had lived in the days of the prophets or apostles, and that I could have had sure guides: for by the misconduct of professors, I thought there were no bible saints in the land.” Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo’s Journal*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Joseph Rakestraw, 1816), 13–14; capitalization in original; see also Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 17.

²⁶³ Scholarly writing generally includes the indication [*sic*] when a quotation includes a misspelled word found in the original text so as not to be mistaken as an error in transcription. In a work such as this, when the primary documents are nearly two centuries old from an era where American English spelling was not yet standardized, it would be laborious and distracting to include the [*sic*] after each instance of an unrecognized, but not necessarily incorrect, spelling. The author has taken careful measures to eliminate errors in transcription and provides to the reader the flavorful spelling, grammar, and emphases as found in nineteenth-century writing and newspapers for a more immersive historical experience. Footnote citations include information concerning original spellings and if changes were necessitated. This is also according to the *Chicago Manual of Style, 17th Edition*, used as the formatting standard for the dissertation.

²⁶⁴ Smith, “History, circa Summer 1832,” 1–3; spelling in original, punctuation modernized.

²⁶⁵ I. Daniel Rupp, ed., *An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States* (Philadelphia: J. Y. Humphreys, 1844), 404. Rupp’s work is sometimes cited with an additional line found on the second title page, “He Pasa Ekklesia” [The Whole Church]. James 1:5 as quoted by Joseph Smith Jr., “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons*, March 15, 1842, 726–27.

Smith recalled that it was on the morning of a beautiful clear day in the spring of 1820 near his family's log home in Manchester, New York, outside of Palmyra, that he retired to the privacy of the woods to petition God which church was his.²⁶⁶ The vision that followed is known in Mormondom as the "First Vision."²⁶⁷

I retired to a secret place in a grove and began to call upon the Lord, while fervently engaged in supplication my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day. They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom.²⁶⁸

Deeply impressed, Smith attempted a short while later to share his grand godly encounter with a Methodist preacher but was "greatly surprised" at the reaction. "He treated my

²⁶⁶ Smith Jr., "History of Joseph Smith," March 15, 1842, 728.

²⁶⁷ Smith's first manifestation occurred in 1820 when he was approximately fourteen years old with very little need or ability to publish it. Unknown was his future prophetic role and unlikely was an interested press. Thus, the following is extracted from sources anachronistic with its happening—during which interim Smith developed a disdain and distrust of disbelieving, agenda-setting editors, and which span opens the version to questions of historical accuracy. Despite multiple available versions of Smith's experience and the notable lapse of approximately twenty-two years between the event and this publication, I chose to quote Smith's own authorized, first-person account in the Mormon organ, the *Times and Seasons* of Nauvoo, Illinois, for continuity of crafting a cultural history from newspaper accounts.

²⁶⁸ Smith Jr., "Church History," 706-07. A more detailed explanation of the vision and its documentation is outside the purview of this study. It is sufficient to note that Smith appears to have given four first-hand accounts of what happened and contemporaries who heard Smith speak of it recorded it in five additional sources. See "Primary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision of Deity," The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision>. Scholars have taken up the subject and have discussed it extensively. See, for example, Dean C. Jessee, "The Earliest Documented Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," in *Opening the Heavens Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, ed. John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson, Documents in Latter-Day Saint History (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City, UT: Brigham Young University Press and Deseret Book, 2005), 1-34.

communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there was no such thing as visions or revelations in these days.”²⁶⁹

Smith’s adolescent religious ponderings had previously gone unnoticed in the village.²⁷⁰ “I soon found however,” Smith regretted, “that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion and was the cause of great persecution which continued to increase.... This was common among all the sects: all united to persecute me.”²⁷¹ Smith recoiled and deep reticence for sharing the vision poignantly overlaid and tempered his joyful rejoicing that the Lord was with him.²⁷²

Moroni and the Gold Plates

Approximately three years after Smith’s first vision, he, one night, betook himself “to prayer and supplication to Almighty God for forgiveness of all [his] sins and follies.” His 1842 *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, IL) account continued: “I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation as I had previously had one.”²⁷³ As he prayed, a light appeared in the room until it was “lighter than at noon day.” Immediately a personage in a loose robe of “most exquisite whiteness” appeared and instructed him concerning, among other things, “a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the

²⁶⁹ Joseph Smith Jr., “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1842, 748; see also Joseph Smith Jr., “History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834],” n.d., 3, The Joseph Smith Papers.

²⁷⁰ See Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 35.

²⁷¹ Smith Jr., “History of Joseph Smith,” April 1, 1842, 748–49; see also Smith, “History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834],” 4.

²⁷² See Smith, “History, circa Summer 1832,” 3.

²⁷³ Smith Jr., “History of Joseph Smith,” April 1, 1842, 749.

former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang.”²⁷⁴

The angel, calling himself Moroni, explained that the book contained also the fullness of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ and an account of a visit by the Savior to the American continent after his death and resurrection. With the ancient plates “were two stones in silver bows, and these stones fastened to a breastplate constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim ... and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.” At the end of the interview, what was Smith’s surprise when the messenger returned twice more that same night to repeat the instructions. “So deep were the impressions made on my mind that sleep had fled from my eyes and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard.”²⁷⁵

The abrupt and frequently sarcastic American press rehearsed the story of the angel and the gold plates as early as 1829. The first known non-Mormon record of the Moroni vision is from the *Palmyra (NY) Freeman*, which embellished the account with exclamation points to emphasize its preposterousness. Mormon proselytes, it said, gave the following account:

In the fall of 1827, a person by the name of *Joseph Smith* ... reported that he had been visited in a dream by the spirit of the Almighty, and informed that in a certain hill in that town, was deposited this Golden Bible, containing an ancient record of a divine nature and origin. After having been thrice thus visited, as he states, he proceeded to the spot, and after having penetrated “mother earth” a short distance, the Bible was found, together with a huge pair of spectacles! He had been directed, however, not to let any mortal being examine them, “under no less penalty” than instant death! They were therefore nicely wrapped up, and excluded from the “vulgar gaze of poor wicked mortals!”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Joseph Smith Jr., “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons*, April 15, 1842, 753–54.

²⁷⁵ Smith Jr., 753–54.

²⁷⁶ “Golden Bible,” *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829; italics and emphases in

At least seven newspapers in the exchange soon reprinted the *Freeman* article with increasing numbers of exclamation points, and no less than eighteen newspapers reaching across five states in the Northeast printed twenty-two articles by October 1831 that included some description of Moroni's visit. Though predominantly nameless, Moroni appeared in the American press conclusively through the next decade and as late as 1841.

Most editors treated the event with mocking disbelief and, in the absence of a Mormon press, readers had no authority to consult. Some newspapers provided the readers with very interesting detailed accounts quite seriously and professionally written. Details abounded and were conflated as editors fixated on the fable. The *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer* elaborated on the secreted plates. The "poor ignorant man" dug where directed and

opened the sacred depository and found enclosed a bundle of plates resembling gold, carefully united at one edge with three silver wires so that they opened like a book. The plates were about 7 inches long and 6 broad, and the whole pile was about 6 inches deep, each plate about the thickness of tin.²⁷⁷

Smith's formalized version of 1842 announced that Moroni's description of the location and purpose of the plates was accompanied with an image of such clarity that "owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there." Smith discovered a thick stone with a rounded top partially submerged in

original. Smith's account reads: "Again he [Moroni] told me that ... I should not show them to any person ... only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them, if I did I should be destroyed." Smith Jr., "History of Joseph Smith," April 15, 1842, 753.

²⁷⁷ "Delusion," *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, December 7, 1830; Transcription from Dale L. Morgan, *Dale Morgan on the Mormons: Collected Works, Part 2, 1949-1970*, ed. Richard L. Saunders, vol. 15, *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 205.

the earth. Having obtained a lever and prying up the rock, he saw a box formed by stones set in some kind of cement in which the items were contained. He attempted to remove them but was forbidden and told that he was to return to that place precisely in one year where Moroni would again meet him. This annual anniversary was to repeat until the time arrived to be given the plates.²⁷⁸

Four years later, Smith's new wife, Emma Hale, stayed at the bottom of the hill with the horse and carriage as Smith accepted responsibility for the plates. The same heavenly messenger delivered the plates up to Smith with the charge that: "I should be responsible for them: that if I should let them go carelessly or through any neglect of mine I should be cut off; but that if I would use all my endeavors to preserve them, until he the messenger should call for them, they should be protected."²⁷⁹

Smith's life was immediately occupied with defending the plates. Astonished at the burdensome weight of the gold, he described the immediate strenuous exertions and strategies used to get the plates from him.²⁸⁰ Smith recalled:

The excitement however still continued, and rumour with her thousand tongues was all the time employed in circulating tales about my father's family and about myself. If I were to relate a thousandth part of them it would fill volumes. The persecution however became so intolerable that I was under the necessity of

²⁷⁸ Smith, "History of Joseph Smith," 771–72.

²⁷⁹ Smith, 771–72; see also Smith, "History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834]," 8.

²⁸⁰ Smith, "History of Joseph Smith," 771–72; see also Smith, "History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834]," 8. Book of Mormon biographer Paul C. Gutjahr described Smith's "Gold Bible" as a sore temptation for determined and violent "treasure hunters intent on making their fortune by stealing the golden plates. For the next three years Joseph waged a constant battle to protect the plates from others who had more interest in their gold than in their spiritual substance." Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 17.

leaving Manchester and going with my wife [to her home] in the State of Pennsylvania.²⁸¹

Smith learned instead, however, that opposition was to be the most frequent fruit of his labors wherever he went.

The Book of Mormon

Two and a half years later the Palmyra, New York, *Wayne Sentinel* reprinted the title page of the Book of Mormon and this addition: “The above work, containing about 600 pages, large Duodecimo, is now for sale, wholesale and retail, at the Palmyra Bookstore, by HOWARD & GRANDIN.”²⁸² Editors had penned no fewer than thirty-six articles on Smith’s mysterious and dubious book by the time of its publication.²⁸³

The quietness with which the Book of Mormon went on sale was shattered less than one week later. The *Rochester (NY) Daily Advertiser* of April 2, 1830, printed an article that surpassed the earlier, notable rebuke of the *Palmyra (NY) Freeman* in the number of exchange-newspaper reprints, geographical coverage, and derision. At least

²⁸¹ Smith, “History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834],” 8; spelling in original.

²⁸² “The Book of Mormon,” *Wayne Sentinel*, March 26, 1830; capitalization in original. Similarly, the book binder, Luther Howard, also advertised the availability of the Book of Mormon in his Palmyra newspaper, buried amid titles of other books for sale. See, for example, Luther Howard, “Miscellaneous Books,” *Western Spectator and Public Advertiser*, April 5, 1831. “Duodecimo” refers to a book size of about 5 x 7.5 inches (13 x 9 cm), determined by printing on sheets folded to form twelve leaves or twenty-four pages.

²⁸³ For an examination of the newspaper implications of the Book of Mormon using sources discovered for but not addressed in this dissertation, see Jeremy J. Chatelain, “The Early Reception of the Book of Mormon in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey et al. (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City, UT: BYU and Deseret Book, 2015), 173–98.

eleven newspapers, with a small degree of variation, gave the aforementioned shout: “**BLASPHEMY**— ... The ‘Book of Mormon’ has been placed in our hands. A viler imposition was never practised. It is an evidence of fraud, blasphemy and credulity, shocking to the Christian and moralist.” The editors were aghast that a fellow named Joseph Smith Jr. had, “by some hocus pocus, acquired such an influence over a wealthy farmer of Wayne county [Martin Harris], that the latter mortgaged his farm for \$3,000 which he paid for printing and binding 5000 copies of this blasphemous work.” The editors then included a surprisingly accurate, brief description of the books of the Book of Mormon, and reproduced, without alteration, the preface regarding the 116 stolen pages and the “testimonials” of the witnesses.²⁸⁴

Newspaper commentary on the Book of Mormon multiplied in 1830, the year previous to Smith’s relocation to Kirtland, Ohio. No fewer than 153 articles filled the pages of sixty-eight newspapers in nine states on the topic during the year. The overwhelmingly critical non-Mormon editorials on Mormonism’s first printed text were American readers’ first perception of the new religion. Mormonism’s principal text remained a primary conversation about the sect until Smith’s death in 1844. While researching newspapers for this dissertation, the author identified 786 articles that mention the Book of Mormon from its translation in 1829 to the death of its translator in

²⁸⁴ “Blasphemy,” *Ithaca Journal and General Advertiser*, April 28, 1830; emphasis and spelling in original. Smith was commanded not to show the plates to anyone except for eleven men who were to act as witnesses that the plates did exist and that Smith had them in his possession. Their testimonies, divided into “The Testimony of Three Witnesses” and “The Testimony of Eight Witnesses,” were appended to and published with the Book of Mormon. For more information on the testimony of the witnesses as treated by American editors, see Chatelain, “The Early Reception of the Book of Mormon in Nineteenth-Century America,” 176, 180–81.

1844.

Quantifying the degree to which the agendas of such articles shaped the reception of the Book of Mormon in the minds of Americans is difficult. Yet, print historians have recognized the power of the national print culture that took form in the early nineteenth century, and one such scholar declared, “an expanding press was a visible force for change in the new nation, its impact registered in every area of American life.”²⁸⁵ Regarding the barrage of bad press directed at Smith and the Book of Mormon, LDS historian Richard L. Bushman wrote, “The [news]papers elevated Joseph [Smith] from an obscure money-digger of local fame to full-blown religious imposter.”²⁸⁶

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century America was ripe for the introduction and collisions of new American faiths. The democratization and commodification of religion springing from the First Amendment right of freedom of religion exploded via the strengths and widespread reach of its companion liberty, freedom of the press.²⁸⁷ Seekers were gratified with the unprecedented number of choices of earthy spiritual populism American freedoms provided them. The voracious appetite of American readers was satiated with “religions of the book” and were informed and entertained with editorials about such books, fanatical religionists, and utopian experiments. Among these was Joseph Smith’s

²⁸⁵ Gross, “Editor’s Introduction,” 4; emphasis removed for clarity.

²⁸⁶ Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 82.

²⁸⁷ For a scholarly treatment and intriguing theses concerning nineteenth-century interrelation between freedom of religion and free press, see Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*.

Mormonism—founded on the press and faced with a lifetime of perpetuating and defending itself with the press.

Mormonism began and solidified in New York and Pennsylvania in 1829 and 1830. Prophecies in the newly published Book of Mormon concerning the millennial city of Zion led Mormon missionaries west to Ohio on their way to Missouri where Smith's revelations directed them the city would be located. Growing persecution in New York and prophecies of unseen dangers became the catalyst to the Mormon migration to Kirtland, Ohio, in early 1831. A sudden influx of former Campbellite converts jumpstarted the Ohio Mormon population and the beliefs and numbers coalesced into a society that roiled the American press for the next seven years. Chapter 5 presents the findings, which begins in earnest the cultural history of the Mormons as editors published to their readers their agendas about the visionary Smith and his followers.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRESS AND AGENDA SETTING DURING THE MORMONS'

KIRTLAND, OHIO, YEARS, 1831-1832

The March of Mormonism. ... The "Golden Bible of Imposition" ... has no parallel in folly and stupidity. ... It has no redeeming feature. It is with regret, however, that we are obliged to add that it has proved successful.

New York Spectator, July 1, 1831²⁸⁸

Introduction

"We hear much these days about the Mormonites, the Mormon Bible, the Book of Mormon, and people are very desirous to know what *Mormon* signifies," editors of the *Brockport (NY) Free Press* penned in April 1831. "The word Mormon comes from the Greek word *mormoo* [and signifies,] '*bugbear, hobgoblin, raw head and bloody bones.*'" The editors claimed the definition came from an English dictionary "of quite ancient date," and, conveniently for them, only "very few copies are now extant" and only in London. They reassured their readers, though, that they had seen a copy of the dictionary and verified the definition. They then surmised that Smith's choice of the word *Mormon* was a succinct, if not unwitting, summary for his purpose of "carrying out his experiment

²⁸⁸ "The March of Mormonism," *New York Spectator*, July 1, 1831, 1. The article originated in the Niagara, New York, *Lockport Balance* and was quickly reprinted in the exchange. See, for example, "The March of Mormonism," *Guernsey Times*, March 16, 1831, 2; "The Mormonites," *Newport Mercury*, June 18, 1831, 1.

on human credulity to the greatest extent—even to give the book a name, in addition to its contents, which would carry on the very face of it the nature of its true character—a fiction of hobgoblins and bugbears.”²⁸⁹ The editor employed two agendas to cause readers to equate the word Mormon and its people with fanaticism and credulity, agendas that increased in frequency in 1831 and 1832.

Religious devotees of the time were frequently termed “-ites” of their leader. Disciples of Smith were, in at least one article, referred to as “Smithites.”²⁹⁰ However, Smith’s followers were more often classified and identified in the pages of newspapers with jabs at their belief in the Book of Mormon and were labeled with a flurry of epithets using the word “Mormon” as the agendas of their fanaticism and credulity were perpetuated.²⁹¹ Interest in, and skepticism of the name *Mormon* by 1831 led to the regular use of the appellation, *Mormonites*, which was later shortened to *Mormons*. It was, nevertheless, not used in kindness.

One indication of the power of an agenda is its replication. The bugbear and hobgoblin definition appeared occasionally in the newspaper exchange over the years and eventually gained new traction thirteen years later in the *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord, NH). However, the editor claimed to increase the credibility of

²⁸⁹ “Mormon Bible,” *Brockport Free Press*, April 6, 1831, 1; spelling and italics in original.

²⁹⁰ See, for example, “Correspondence of the Baltimore Sun,” *Sun*, September 20, 1842, 4.

²⁹¹ For example, a group of Mormons migrating from New York to Ohio were called “A company of ‘Golden Bible Pilgrims’” in April 1831. *Ithaca Journal and General Advertiser*, April 27, 1831, 3. Another paper referred to the group as “follower of Jo Smith’s Bible speculation.” “Mormon Emigration,” *Erie Gazette*, May 19, 1831, 3.

the definition by citing ancient Greek texts and appended the definition with the phrase, “a hideous spectre, a frightful mask, something to frighten children.”²⁹² Weary of the imbecilic attribution, Smith finally responded with the Mormon printed agenda of dispelling, correcting, or offsetting incorrect perceptions in 1843. The Mormon paper, the Nauvoo, Illinois, *Times and Seasons*, explained that Mormon’s name literally meant “more good.”²⁹³ The belated clarification was trivialized by the New Hampshire editor when he claimed that Smith “ignorantly [pretended] that Mormon was a sacred Jewish name ... and [has] attempted to clothe the word Mormon with a sacred meaning.”²⁹⁴ American editors inscribed an indelible and irksome identity on Mormonism’s believers from its earliest days and its impact is seen in its repetition and Mormon rebuttal. The effectiveness with which they set their agendas for public consumption during 1831 and 1832 placed Smith and his newspapermen continually on the defensive against definitions, interpretations, and criticisms of Mormonism carefully selected and crafted by editors to influence the thoughts of their readers.²⁹⁵

²⁹² “Mormon,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, February 29, 1844, 4.

²⁹³ Joseph Smith Jr., “Correspondence,” *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1843, 2. The Church and its followers have never escaped the nickname for which they have established a formal style guide and have reframed as a worthy moniker. See “Style Guide - The Name of the Church - LDS Newsroom”; Gordon B. Hinckley, “Mormon Should Mean ‘More Good,’” October 1990, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1990/10/mormon-should-mean-more-good?lang=eng>.

²⁹⁴ “Mormon,” 4.

²⁹⁵ Book of Mormon historian Terryl L. Givens asserted that whatever the book’s “fortunes among skeptics, scholars, and even saints, the scripture has remained a constant in anchoring Mormon identity and distinctiveness.” It has “served to identify and unify the Mormon people,” and believers and former-believers “cannot escape its power to name them and to shape the language of the religious culture.” Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, 242–43.

This chapter begins the cultural history of the Mormons in Kirtland, Ohio—a recounting of the Mormon experience as set in type by editors near and far and with varied agendas. Editors and readers alike who had no firsthand interaction with Mormons copied and spread descriptions of the new disciples and discipline in the nineteenth-century printing atmosphere that had very little need for objectivity or accuracy. Those in physical proximity to the amassing converts were influenced by immediate financial, political, and geographical concerns, which were mingled with a natural air of skepticism of actions and attitudes of the American pool of populist preachers who were regularly deemed fanatical in the press. Of particular importance is the role of the American newspaper exchange—an unofficial chain of editors eager to fill their pages with national interest that was regularly reduced to enticing tidbits in the constant battle to lure subscribers. Smith and his followers had little knowledge of how thorough and far agenda-setting in the exchange made them an American curiosity and, more dangerously, how quickly the image they were powerless to control may have set readers on edge against them through the whole of the Union.

Chapter 5 traces the thread of printing about the Mormons in the environs of Kirtland, Ohio, from 1831 to 1832. The Mormons did not have a press in these early years to promote their own identity and when their first press was finally established in a satellite congregation in Missouri in 1832, it was silenced by mob action within a year. Without a press to counteract what was being printed about them, Smith and his followers were at the mercy of skeptical editors who were setting the agenda of what Americans thought and believed about the strange new sect. Mormon membership in Kirtland was jumpstarted by the conversion of Campbellite preacher Sidney Rigdon and

many of his flock, and swelled from fifty in 1831 to approximately two thousand by the time the Mormons left in 1837.²⁹⁶ This chapter presents a sample of the 456 articles found in the American press during these two years and details the most pointed and oft-mentioned Mormon topics, including: Mormon relocation to Kirtland; Smith's God/nation prioritization; failed Mormon healing miracles; a typographical error concerning Mormon nationalism; refuting the Book of Mormon; the effects of apostasy; the first Mormon paper; and, a vision of celestial glories. Non-Mormon editors used these topics to set five of their six agendas and Mormons countered with three of their four agendas.²⁹⁷ Agenda Setting and Vilification theories are used to illuminate these carefully crafted agendas and the intentional, calculated shaping of Mormons into a societal enemy.

Delimiting the Mormon City of Zion in Jackson County, Missouri

A matter of delimitation in this chapter's time frame requires consideration. As summarized in Chapter 1, Smith established a Mormon community in the environs of Independence City, Jackson County, Missouri, in July 1831 at the same time the majority of church members were assembling in Kirtland. The habitation in Jackson County, Missouri, was their city of Zion and its millennial import to Mormons cannot be

²⁹⁶ See Anderson, *Joseph Smith's Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts*, 23; see also Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-Day Saints in Ohio 1830-1838* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2012), 140.

²⁹⁷ The non-Mormon agendas were exposing: Mormon dishonesty; fanaticism; credulity and gullibility; power; criminality; and vilification. The Mormon agendas were to: dispel, offset, or correct misperceptions; relay church doctrine and structure; unify a scattered membership; and portray a persecuted people.

overstated. The first Mormon press was established within a year of the Mormon arrival in Missouri in Independence, which was approximately a thousand miles from Smith's oversight in Kirtland where he and his wife resided.²⁹⁸ Two papers issued from the Mormon press starting in 1832; the formal organ of the Church was *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Independence, MO).

Conflict quickly boiled between the mostly northern, antislavery-leaning, exclusionist Mormons and the rough, often lawless, Southern, fiercely-dedicated-to-slavery Missouri frontier settlers. The kindling of religious, economic, and political differences was set ablaze by a Mormon article entitled "Free People of Color," which the old settlers claimed was an intolerable invitation for freed slaves to come to Missouri.²⁹⁹ Committees and mobs were organized that included key political persons that guaranteed exculpation for the destruction of the Mormon printing office, its newspapers, and the newest Mormon scripture then in print. Nonculpability was assured as well for the whipping, tarring and feathering, destruction of Mormon homes and crops, and the wholesale driving of Mormons from the state.³⁰⁰ Smith and his followers stood

²⁹⁸ The distances used in the dissertation are modern-day calculations based on twentieth-century routes in which there are over four million miles of paved and unpaved roads. Distances for nineteenth-century travelers were much increased due to the lack of roadways and nondirect routes used because of more accessible waterways. Historian Daniel Walker Howe listed communication and transportation as the two great barriers in nineteenth-century America. See Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 1-2.

²⁹⁹ William W. Phelps, "Free People of Color," *The Evening and the Morning Star*, July 1833. For an example of the Missouri accusation spread in newspapers through the country via the exchange, see "'Regulating' the Mormonites," *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 21, 1833.

³⁰⁰ For a thorough recounting of the events, see Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, chaps. 8-11.

aghast at the blatant violation of sacred national freedoms. The actions and unrecompensed sufferings they endured in Jackson County, Missouri, became an enduring agenda of shaping a new persecuted identity which they propagated on the pages of the press to place their plight in the minds of American readers—a prime example of Agenda Setting Theory.³⁰¹

Scholars have written extensively on these events and a thorough understanding of early Mormon history requires both the Kirtland and Independence experiences.³⁰² The depth of influences in Jackson County makes it worthy of its own study. Furthermore, the examination of newspapers for this dissertation revealed that American perspectives of the Mormons in Jackson County, Missouri, were shaped by more than 353 articles printed in eighty-two cities and across twenty-two states and provinces and Canada (there were twenty-four states in the Union during the events).³⁰³ It was therefore necessary to delimit an extensive review of the Missouri sources from this chapter and the larger

³⁰¹ Mormon recitations of the atrocities began as quickly as the next Mormon press could be established in Kirtland in late 1833 and played a prominent role in the text in all but a few of the issues. See O. Cowdery, “To the Patrons of the Evening and the Morning Star,” *Evening and Morning Star*, December 1833.

³⁰² See, for example, W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 116–28; Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 85–105; Richard L. Bushman, “Mormon Persecutions in Missouri, 1833,” *BYU Studies* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1960): 11–20.

³⁰³ A cultural history of the Mormon experiences in Jackson County, Missouri, was written for the dissertation that examines the printing implications in the years 1833 and 1834. It introduces a new phase of the Mormon printing agenda, the power of a persecuted people, and analyzes how the events were printed and perceived in American newspapers. It was delimited from the dissertation to reduce the overall length and to maximize readability of the specified scope. See Jeremy J. Chatelain, “A Cultural History of the Mormon Expulsion from Jackson County, Missouri” (Colorado Springs, CO), 2018), 1–90; unpublished manuscript.

dissertation so as to maximize the exploration of newspapers specific to Kirtland. The findings revealed that the study of the press in each locale can be topically and numerically separated without detriment. Nevertheless, essential aspects of the parallel Missouri society have been included as appropriate.

The Ohio

Frontier Ohio

Proud Ohio citizens traced the history of their state from the “vast region claimed by France ... first known by the general name of Louisiana.” American Indians of the Ohio Valley were said to have been key antagonists in the central contests over the “right of soil and jurisdiction” and were generally united against the Americans during the Revolutionary War. However, it was the War of 1812, wrote one contemporary historian, that defined the conduct of Ohio “in every vicissitude” as “eminently patriotic and honorable.” Admitted as a state in 1803, Ohio “cheerfully assumed, and promptly paid her quota” of federal taxes and “her sons volunteered with alacrity their services in the field; and no troops more patiently endured hardship or performed better service.”³⁰⁴

Settlers in the Ohio Valley were Yankees and “Yorkers” and, finding the region too cold for cotton, raised familiar crops such as corn. Enterprising Ohioans found it easier to “convert” corn to pork and sell it up and down the waterways. Cincinnati became known as “Porkopolis” for its ham and lard production that was shipped hundreds and thousands of miles. Ohio had become the fourth most populous state by 1820 and historian Daniel Walker Howe described migrants to have “the same excitable

³⁰⁴ Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Cincinnati: Derby, Bradley & Co., 1847), 1–18.

religious temperament” as seen in burned-over New York.³⁰⁵

Kirtland, Ohio, was, as per an author of the time, a fine country located “in a deep and romantic valley” on a branch of the Chagrin River located in northeastern Ohio along the south shore of Lake Erie with Cleveland situated approximately twenty-three miles southwest.³⁰⁶ Many of its inhabitants were conspicuously religious and, as in New York, “religious intensity and spiritual independence gave birth to a host of innovations in worship and belief.”³⁰⁷

The Move to Kirtland

Smith and his wife, Emma Hale, departed cantankerous neighbors and marauding treasure seekers near his family’s residence in New York in December 1827 to live with Emma’s parents in Harmony, Pennsylvania. The home they purchased from her family afforded them the relative peace required to accomplish much of the translation, which had many interruptions and delays through 1828 and 1829. Near the end of the work, however, growing tension from Emma’s nonbelieving family and irritated townsfolk induced Smith to relocate to the farm of a family of new benefactors in Fayette, New York, to finish. Smith’s efforts surrounding the mysterious gold plates culminated in the publication of their translation into the nearly six-hundred-page Book of Mormon in the spring of 1830 in Palmyra, New York. Believing friends and family rejoiced and Smith formally organized them into a church according to New York State law on April 6,

³⁰⁵ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 137–38.

³⁰⁶ Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio*, 282.

³⁰⁷ Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 146.

1830.

The new church was not without its opposition and 1831 brought with it a revelation to the twenty-six-year-old Smith that exhorted him and his fledging followers to escape unknown dangers in New York and Pennsylvania. The divine injunction was nothing less than authoritative: “THUS saith the Lord your God, even Jesus Christ, the Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” Then, reminiscent of the secret plots behind the theft of the Book of Mormon manuscript pages,³⁰⁸ the Lord declared,

And now I show unto you a mystery, a thing which is had secret chambers, to bring to pass even your destruction, in process of time, and ye knew it not, but now I tell it unto you. . . . The enemy in the secret chambers, seeketh your lives: Ye hear of wars in far countries . . . but ye know not the hearts of them in your own land.³⁰⁹

To escape the power of this unknown enemy, Smith and his followers were commanded to leave New York and Pennsylvania and “go to the Ohio” where they would be given the Lord’s “law” and there “be endowed with power from on high.”³¹⁰

No explanation was given concerning the secretive destruction, or whether it was to be acts of physical violence or weaponized agendas as with the revealed plans for the stolen manuscript. Nevertheless, the edict convinced the earliest Mormons to sell their

³⁰⁸ See J. B. Haws, “The Lost 116 Pages Story: What We Do Know, What We Don’t Know, and What We Might Know,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey et al. (Provo, UT, and Salt Lake City, UT: BYU and Deseret Book, 2015), 81–102.

³⁰⁹ *Book of Commandments*, chap. XL, vv. 1, 12, 30; wording, grammar, and capitalization in original.

³¹⁰ *Book of Commandments*, chap. XL, v. 28. For a thoughtful historiography of this revelation and the outcomes on early Mormons, see Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine & Covenants* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008), 123–31.

farms with very little preparation and atypically in mid-winter for less than market price to follow their new prophet. This exchange of worldly goods for heavenly covenants astounded astute editors at the fiscal impropriety of Mormonism, for, commanded the Lord, those that “have farms, that can not be sold, let them be left or rented as seemeth them good.”³¹¹ A gregarious Palmyra, New York, editor Abner Cole, observing the Mormons leaving New York, disapproved that two “most responsible *Mormonites* ... *demurred* to the divine command, through Jo Smith, requiring them to sell their property and put it into the common *fund*, and repair with all convenient speed to the New Jerusalem.”³¹² He then applauded one gentleman who refused and “informed the prophet that he would rather risque his soul as it was, (having been dipt) than trust his money or property in the hands of such agents.”³¹³ Editors reaffirmed their agenda of Mormon credulity and gullibility as the commentary followed the Mormon move on the pages of the press.

The newspapers noted Smith and his wife’s arrival in January 1831: “Jo Smith,” his “whole ‘holy family’ (as they style themselves,)” and “his *better half*, [arrived in Kirtland]—the prophet well clad, while the *female* exhibited a gold watch—a profusion

³¹¹ *Book of Commandments*, chap. XL, v. 30; spelling in original.

³¹² Cole does not explicate the reference to the “New Jerusalem,” though, for Mormons, it is often used synonymously with *Zion*.

³¹³ Abner Cole, “Mormonism,” *Reflector*, March 9, 1831, 116; spelling and italics in original. Abner Cole was the most prolific commentator on Mormonism in New York with more than fifty editorials on Smith and the new religion in the few years his paper was solvent. It was his newspaper that was printed on the same press at the same time as the Book of Mormon, which gave him unprecedented and non-permissioned access to the text. For more information on Cole, see Mangun and Chatelain, “For ‘The Cause of Civil and Religious Liberty’: Abner Cole and the Palmyra, New York, Reflector”; Hedges, “The Refractory Abner Cole.”

of rings, &c.— demonstrating the fact, that even *Mormonism* is a ‘living business.’”³¹⁴

At least thirty-five newspapers across ten states and in twenty-eight cities chronicled the Mormon migration in the first six months of 1831. The exchange carried the following lamentation through its central veins to Pennsylvania and Washington City (D.C.)—

Mormon Emigration.— About two hundred men, women and children, of the deluded followers of Jo Smith’s Bible speculation, have arrived on our coast, during the last week, from the state of New-York, and are about seating themselves down upon the “promised land” in this county. It is surely a melancholy comment upon human nature to see so many people at this enlightened age of the world, truckling along at the car of a miserable imposture, submitting themselves, both soul and body, to his spiritual and temporal mandates, without a murmur, or presuming to question that it is all a command direct from Heaven.³¹⁵

This and each of the Mormon movements throughout the next decade caught the attention of editors who spread the agenda to Americans that the Mormons were foolishly quick to believe anything, which increased the angst against them as Mormon numbers and controversy intensified. Without a press of their own until 1832, the Mormons had no means for their agenda of counteracting mindless follower missives.

³¹⁴ Cole, “Mormonism,” 116; italics in original; “Waterloo, Jan. 26, 1830,” *Reflector*, February 1, 1831, 95.

³¹⁵ “Mormon Emigration,” *Daily National Journal*, May 26, 1831; italics and spelling in original. This article originated in the *Painesville Telegraph* of May 17, 1831 and was reprinted in the *Erie Gazette* on May 19, 1831. The *Daily National Journal*, quoted herein, did not include the last five lines of the original article.

Setting the Agenda About the Mormons as They
Moved to Kirtland, Ohio, 1831

The Neighborhood Aroused

Editors occupied themselves with the Mormons in nearly one article per day in 1831 written in more than 123 newspapers. The sheets blanketed seventy-seven cities and were discussed in homes dispersed across twenty out of twenty-four states in the union—all before the Mormons had set up their own press. Sixty-two percent of editors wrote with critical tones, 27 percent offered objective or neutral appraisals, and of the 331 total articles for the year, as few as five had positive strains and only one offered sympathetic viewpoints to Mormon beginnings. Smith faced an avalanche of negative images as he and his little flock ventured into new frontiers and eked out their identity.

The Palmyra, New York, *Reflector* led the charge against the transplanted Mormons. Its editor, Abner Cole, had proven to be a potent antagonist to Smith in New York during the publication of the Book of Mormon.³¹⁶ Cole knew anything Mormon was good reading and, despite Smith's departure to Ohio, used the renewed interest to further his efforts to uncloak Smith. Cole promised his readers and the unsuspecting inhabitants of Kirtland a methodical evaluation of the rise of Mormonism in a series of "Gold Bible" editorials that were picked up haphazardly through the exchange. Cole printed six inarticulate articles from January to March 1831 covering such topics as the

³¹⁶ Abner Cole published his *Reflector* in the evenings on the same press Smith had hired to print the Book of Mormon. Cole pilfered pages of the copyrighted Book of Mormon which was being printed and bound in the office around him and printed them in his paper. Smith instigated an arbitration that stopped Cole's copyright violation, but only served to increase his freethought approach to placing people, ideas, and beliefs under the lens of critical thinking. For more information on Cole, see Mangun and Chatelain, "For 'The Cause of Civil and Religious Liberty': Abner Cole and the Palmyra, New York, Reflector"; Hedges, "The Refractory Abner Cole."

Smith family's money digging enterprises, comparisons to religious fanatics such as Joanna Southcott³¹⁷ and religious texts such as the Koran, Smith's witnesses of the plates, translating with seer stones in hats,³¹⁸ and the apparent plagiarism of the Bible that was "entirely altered for the worst."³¹⁹ Cole was a self-proclaimed revealer of Smith's falsehoods, the agenda of Mormon dishonesty, as well as a vigorous instigator of the agenda of Mormon fanaticism.

Cole employed Miltonian free-speech theory to elevate his purposeful criticisms of Smith in the minds of his free-press-loving readers. "It is not from a persecuting spirit," the column read, "that I solicit an exposure, for my maxim is, that 'error is never dangerous, where truth is free to combat it,' and that liberty of conscience in matters of

³¹⁷ Joanna Southcott (1750-1814) was an "English religious fanatic." Originally Methodist, she became persuaded that she possessed supernatural gifts and dictated prophecies in rhyme. She claimed to be the woman prophetess spoken of in the book of Revelation and began sealing the elect mentioned in that book for money. She had a purported one hundred thousand followers. "Southcott, Joanna," *1911 Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed January 1, 2018, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Southcott,_Joanna.

³¹⁸ Smith offered very little detail concerning the process of translation, remarking simply that the Book of Mormon was translated "by the gift and power of God." His records do include, nevertheless, references to clear stones set in silver rims much like eyeglasses and a "seer stone" about the size and shape of an egg into which he looked for the translation. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has the latter in its possession and has published explanations and a picture of the seer stone. "Joseph the Seer," accessed January 2, 2018, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2015/10/joseph-the-seer?lang=eng>.

³¹⁹ Abner Cole, "Gold Bible, No. 5," *Reflector*, February 28, 1831, 109. For the "Gold Bible" series, see Abner Cole, "Gold Bible," *Reflector*, January 6, 1831, 76; Abner Cole, "Gold Bible, No. 2," *Reflector*, January 18, 1831, 84; Abner Cole, "Gold Bible, No. 3," *Reflector*, February 1, 1831, 92–93; Abner Cole, "Gold Bible, No. 4," *Reflector*, February 14, 1831, 100–101; Cole, "Gold Bible, No. 5," 109; Abner Cole, "Gold Bible, No. 6," *Reflector*, March 19, 1831, 126–27.

religion, should be allowed to all.”³²⁰ It is doubtful Smith considered the attacks, particularly on his family, to be merely the enlightening contest between truth and error in the arena of free speech. Nevertheless, Cole’s editorials influenced those in Kirtland who were interested in the history of their new neighbors, an effect of agenda setting.

Far more prevalent in the exchange than Cole’s ramblings was an article apparently first seen in the Painesville, Ohio, *Geauga Gazette* on February 2, 1831, eleven miles northeast of Kirtland. Its spread from Painesville was the most profound and far-reaching thus far in the history of Mormonism—much like a drip in a pond that rippled across eighteen newspapers in fourteen cities through nine states from Massachusetts to Arkansas. Its tone was considerably more objective than the personal vitriol found in the *Reflector* and, although its unfettered report of Mormon intrigue was novelesque, it had an air of truth that perpetuated its retelling. Its beginning was familiar: “The believers in the sacred authenticity of this miserable production [the Book of Mormon], are known by the name of ‘Mormonites.’” They have “recently received,” it continued, “an additional revelation from the prolific prophet, Smith, which is generally understood to say that Kirtland is within the precincts of the holy land.”³²¹ Concerned readers were then apprised of the “great gathering of mighty multitudes” of Mormons that would quickly overwhelm frontier resources, housing, prices, and politics—the

³²⁰ “Communications,” *Reflector*, January 6, 1831, 77. The text is purportedly a letter to the editor by the pseudonymous writer “Plain Truth.” For John Milton’s free speech ideology, see John Milton, *Areopagitica: A Speech to the Parliament of England, for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing* (London: Charles Wood, 1819).

³²¹ Editors did not clarify what they meant by the term “holy land.” It could have meant the Mormon Zion in Missouri or have been intended to describe Kirtland. The Mormons did not have a press by the time this article was printed, so it was not a term they were printing.

agenda of revealing and warning against Mormon power.³²²

Readers were now primed to believe what came next—a letter “written in heaven by the finger of God” in the style of “round Italian” in letters of gold. The intended recipient, a young Mormon man, reached heavenward to clutch the letter as it descended from the skies. The “favored youth immediately attempted to copy the communication, but as fast as he wrote, the letters of the original disappeared until it entirely vanished.” The ethereal was followed by the fanatical. Among the Mormons, the article continued, “is a man of colour, a chief man, who is sometimes seized with strange vagaries, and odd conceits.” Fancying he could fly, “he is said to have jumped twenty five feet down a wash bank into a tree top without injury.” Finally, in a total of eighty-three lines, the Mormon mentality is further mocked with the story of another man who had “torn away all the partitions of the lower part of a good two story dwelling house” so that a large number of Mormons could live and eat together. The food consisted of meat and vegetables placed in the center of the room where individuals walked about the room eating as they circled the table.³²³ Editors spread intrigue about the Mormons through the country that satisfied subscribers and reinforced the agendas that shaped their suspicions about the obvious fanatics.

Another editorial with similar descriptions of Mormon behavior was summarized

³²² “The Golden Bible, or The Book of Mormon,” *Ashtabula Journal*, February 5, 1831, 3; spelling in original. When the existence of an article was verified via triangulating sources but was not available to me for the study—such as in the *Geauga Gazette* (Painesville, OH) article discussed—I quote and cite one of the replicating exchange papers in my possession instead. The *Ashtabula (OH) Journal* used in this instance referenced the *Geauga Gazette* from which it took its text and was printed three days later.

³²³ “The Golden Bible, or The Book of Mormon,” 3.

by the *New York American* and eleven additional papers in August and September 1831 in New York, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania: “If the accounts received be not inconceivably exaggerated, [then the Mormons] are amongst the most blind and deluded people we have upon record.”³²⁴ What was so bothersome about the “infatuated people”? The printed answer was that their

religious ceremonies and observances are forms of obscenity and blasphemy, and are conducted in a manner shocking to the sense of rational creatures. In their excesses, unrestrained by the presence of the opposite sex, and in one assembly—they roll naked on the floor, and exhibit a variety of grotesque and unseemly forms, that humanity would blush to name.³²⁵

These newspapers in eight states—which brought the news and the views therein to readers of one-third of the states in the United States in 1831—were more than just offended at the moral indecency, for “if we may place confidence in the reports of the newspapers,” they warned, the Mormons “are becoming more numerous, and assuming a more formidable appearance.”³²⁶ Most readers never knew, however, that the article was erroneously describing the followers of Joseph C. Dylkes, a stranger who appeared in an 1828 camp meeting in southeastern Ohio and proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, not Joseph Smith’s Mormons. A careless juxtaposition of facts on the part of one editor was reproduced without question by others whose repetition was interpreted by readers, according to Agenda Setting Theory, as increased verification and importance.³²⁷ Smith

³²⁴ “Mormonism,” *New York American*, August 30, 1831, 4.

³²⁵ “Mormonism,” *New-Hampshire Sentinel*, September 9, 1831, 1.

³²⁶ “Mormonism,” *Pennsylvania Inquirer*, August 25, 1831.

³²⁷ Joseph C. Dylkes was reported in one Ohio history to have been a “handsome, well-dressed man, who made his advent mysteriously [in 1828] at the Leatherwood Creek camp-meeting.” He proclaimed himself to be the Messiah and accumulated followers

faced an uphill battle of public opinion set by editors who were swayed by inaccuracies.

The Perpetuating Power of the Press

Editors had spread their interpretations of Mormonism so widely by 1831 (the Mormons had only been in Kirtland about a year) that even the powerful and highly recognized New York editor, James Gordon Bennett, began his depiction of Mormonism with the need to convince readers to read his version despite the many already available. “You have heard of MORMONISM—who has not?” he opened. The report continued:

Paragraph has followed paragraph in the newspapers, recounting the movements, detailing their opinions and surprising distant readers with the traits of a singularly new religious sect which ... is the latest device of roguery, ingenuity, ignorance, and religious excitement.³²⁸

Editors claimed to have a conflicting relationship with the Mormon topic; they knew that the more they printed about it, the more they perpetuated it and often censured their own role in propelling the very things they criticized.

until a few “muscular unbelievers” encouraged him to leave the county. He was known as “the Leatherwood God.” Rowland H. Rerick, *History of Ohio* (Madison, WI: Northwestern Historical Association, 1905), 243. Early Mormon newspaper hobbyist Dale R. Broadhurst maintains an impressive resource of transcriptions of nineteenth-century American newspapers on Mormonism. Of the identity error he wrote, “The careless extraction of text resulted in the prophecies and ‘unseemly forms’ of the followers of Joseph C. Dylkes ... being interspersed indiscriminately with the activities of the Mormons, resulting in a complete jumble of fact and fiction.” “Uncle Dale’s Old Mormon Articles: Philadelphia, 1830-39,” accessed March 31, 2016, <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/PA/Phil1830.htm#081831>.

³²⁸ As transcribed in Leonard J. Arrington, “James Gordon Bennett’s 1831 Report on ‘The Mormonites,’” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (1970): 6; emphasis in original; see also “Mormonism—Religious—Fanaticism—Church and State Party,” *Huron Reflector*, October 10, 1831, 4. James Gordon Bennett was the founder, editor, and publisher of the *New York Herald*. Among other notable journalism practices, he is known for introducing the journalist interview for stories. See James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett’s New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

For example, Painesville, Ohio, editor Eber D. Howe, eleven miles from Kirtland, whose ire for his new neighbor Smith was poignantly genuine, declared that his duty to warn others about the new delusion subjugated his disdain for the sect. “We can assure our readers that we take no pleasure in publishing anything on this subject. But we have always deemed it as a bounden duty to expose every base imposition which may be attempted upon the credulous and unsuspecting.”³²⁹ Two-thirds of Howe’s thirty-five articles on Mormonism in 1831 were overtly critical. One might wonder if his zealousness had a reverse effect—Howe was less than pleased that his wife and sister were among the credulous and unsuspecting flock who joined the Ohio Mormons.³³⁰

The editor of the Philadelphia *Sun* saw the likely future of Mormonism with the prescience editors regularly denied the prophet Smith. Having heretofore purposely avoided the topic of Mormonism, the *Sun* finally conceded its noteworthiness in an article published in August 1831. “We have always laid it down as a maxim,” he began, to “let superstition alone, and it will do no harm.”³³¹ The perceptive editor knew the snowball effect of the press—the more it printed on Mormonism, the more would be printed on Mormonism. Hoping his foresight might be wrong, the *Sun*’s editor concluded,

³²⁹ E. D. Howe, “A Mormon Commission,” *Painesville Telegraph*, April 12, 1831, 2. Noted historian Milton V. Backman oversaw the collection and photocopying of early newspaper articles on Mormonism and their assembly in loose-leaf binders. The Church Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has maintained the collection and the Church History Library now provides access to a digitized version. It is a valuable resource particularly for the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph*.

³³⁰ See “Sophia Hull Howe – Biography,” The Joseph Smith Papers, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/sophia-hull-howe?highlight=Sophia%20Hull%20Howe>.

³³¹ “Mormonites,” *The Sun*, August 18, 1831; transcription by Dale R. Broadhurst.

“Mormonites have immigrated to their new ‘Land of Promise’ [in Kirtland, Ohio, and] it is hoped that we shall hear from them but very seldom.”³³² Apparently his prescience had run out—the Mormons were mentioned in no fewer than 456 articles while in Kirtland in 1831 and 1832, which meant, on average, somewhere across the country subscribers read of Mormonism more than every other day during these two years. The thoroughness with which editors set their Mormon agenda before readers is remarkable even at this early stage in Kirtland. At least twelve newspapers reprinted the spring 1831 lamentation of the *Lockport (NY) Balance* concerning Mormonism’s success: “It is with regret, however, that we are obliged to add, that it has not proved unsuccessful.”³³³

A Warning of Smith’s God/Nation Hierarchy

Smith amassed over these first years a number of handwritten “Commandments” (revelations) written on behalf of relatives and friends. They also served to establish Mormon doctrine, one of the four Mormon agendas. His continual reception of revelation was mocked on the pages of both religious and nonreligious papers as the Mormon population and purpose grew in Kirtland. “Go where we will,” the Massachusetts *Salem Gazette* reprinted, “we hear little except Mormonism.” Then, regarding the incredible idea of continuing revelation, the paper continued: Smith “pretends that he goes to the Lord occasionally for advice, and they think, yea they *know* they have all their orders

³³² “Mormonites;” transcription by Dale R. Broadhurst.

³³³ “The March of Mormonitism,” *Philadelphia Album and Ladies’ Literary Gazette*, June 18, 1831, 197. See also *Wayne Sentinel*, May 27, 1831; *Guernsey Times*, March 16, 1831; *Working Man’s Advocate*, June 11, 1831; *Newport Mercury*, June 18, 1831; *Daily Albany Argus*, June 21, 1831; *Episcopal Watchman*, June 21, 1831; *New York Spectator*, July 1, 1831; *Rhode Island Republican*, July 5, 1831; *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 6, 1831.

from head quarters, even from the Lord Almighty, through the mouth of his prophet.”³³⁴

In this manner, editors alerted the public to the possibility that the Mormon leader placed a dubious connection to an unverifiable deity in a higher standing than the laws of the land, a dangerous position in a nation of patriots. Editors were not against spiritualism—unless it trumped the national establishment. This was among the earliest evidences of editors broaching the vilification process by warning readers of potential harms that could be inflicted by a people focused on the will of an unknown God instead of the national interest.

Miscellaneous Miracles and Minutiae

Editors were fascinated with any sort of detail from the Mormons that strengthened one or more of their six agendas. An editor nineteen miles from Smith in Kirtland was amused or amazed that “Martin Harris, one of the original Mormon prophets,” passed through town on his way to Kirtland with a remarkable vision to tell.

³³⁴ “The Mormon Delusion,” *Salem Gazette*, May 6, 1831, 1; italics and spelling in original. The article was found to have been reprinted in six exchange papers. See also *Hampshire Gazette*, April 27, 1831; *Hampshire Sentinel*, May 13, 1831; *Presbyterian*, May 25, 1831; *Episcopal Recorder*, June 18, 1831; *Vermont Chronicle*, June 24, 1831. In an interesting twist, multiple editors printed some of Smith’s revelations. Most often the transcriptions were without commentary or error. It is unknown why, with such strong purposes to convince the public of the peculiarity of Mormonism, editors would publish Smith’s doctrines for him. It may have been an example of publishers’ pride for accurate transcription, or an early approach to let the Mormon evidence stand for or against itself. No fewer than six Ohio newspapers ran the “Secret Bye Laws of the Mormonites” provided to the *Ravenna (OH) Courier* by “a responsible and intelligent individual, who has devoted much time to make himself acquainted with the principles, practices and objects of the Mormonite leaders.” The text comprised approximately 219 lines in the Warren, Ohio, *Warren News-Letter and Trumbull County Republican* and included a postscript that clarified some of the revelation. “Secret Bye Laws of the Mormonites,” *Warren News-Letter and Trumbull County Republican*, September 13, 1831. See also *Painesville Telegraph* September 13, 1831; *Western Reserve Chronicle*, September 22, 1831; *Huron Reflector*, September 26, 1831.

“He says he has seen Jesus Christ, and that ‘he is the handsomest man he ever did see.’ He has also seen the Devil, whom he describes to be a very sleek haired fellow, with four feet, and a head like a Jackass.”³³⁵ Harris’s association, antics, and enthusiasm appeared nearly weekly throughout 1831 in fifty-nine articles in nearly as many newspapers in the continued agenda of Mormon fanaticism. Harris’s vision of Jesus and the devil was seen by readers 522 miles away in Charlotte, North Carolina, and in five additional states and Washington City (D.C.).³³⁶ Editors availed themselves of every opportunity to show the ludicrousness of the faith or its members, particularly its principal men.

The Mormons were regularly chided for their beliefs in miracles and apostolic gifts. Smith’s mother led a group of believers from New York to Ohio via Lake Erie. The winter weather, however, conspired against them by freezing their port of departure. Hezekiah Niles, influential newspaperman and publisher of the Baltimore *Niles’ Weekly Register*, printed with noticeable sarcasm that the Mormons “have full faith in the Mormon doctrine, having as they say, worked a miracle in clearing a passage through the ice at Buffalo.”³³⁷ Smith’s mother, an irrepressible character in early Mormon history and the miracle’s instigator, called together some of her fellow stranded saints. She instructed them to petition heaven to open the icy way. “At that instant a noise was heard, like

³³⁵ “Progress of Mormonism,” *Daily National Journal*, March 30, 1831, 3.

³³⁶ See *Geauga Gazette*, March 15, 1831; *Daily National Journal*, March 30, 1831; *Miners and Farmers Journal*, April 14, 1831; *Connecticut Mirror*, April 16, 1831; *Guernsey Times*, April 16, 1831; *Star*, May 4, 1831; *Berkshire Journal*, May 5, 1831.

³³⁷ “Mormonism,” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, July 16, 1831, 353. Hezekiah Niles published his Baltimore *Niles’ Weekly Register* from 1811 to sometime in 1844. He was a forerunner of journalistic objectivity and has been called the “editor who tried to stop the Civil War.” Bill Kovarik, *Revolutions in Communication: Media History from Gutenberg to the Digital Age*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 62.

bursting thunder,” her published history states. “The ice parted, leaving barely a passage for the boat, and so narrow, that as the boat passed through, the buckets of the waterwheel were torn off with a crash.” The Mormons having narrowly navigated the gauntlet, the ice immediately closed.³³⁸ Extant newspaper text such as the *Niles’ Register* indicates editors were aware of the story, though none were found to have printed it. Miracle or not, the matriarch was not to be messed with as mobs and bystanders learned.

Among other miscellaneous topics, editors were quick to point out unwilling spouses lured from homes and families to satisfy Mormon megalomania.³³⁹ Seven newspapers in five states posed the plight of such poor women. However, at least one husband had also been jilted and wanted the country to know. It shouted in big, black, want-ad lettering:

CAUTION. WHEREAS, HANNAH, my wife, has left my bed and board, and joined the *Mormonites*. This is to forbid all persons harboring or trusting her on my account, as I will pay no debts of her contracting after this date. [signed] John M. Fosdick.³⁴⁰

The ad was published for at least two weeks.

Editors fixated on Mormon claims of miraculous healings and, at a time in history when doctors were often deadly, the press recycled the notion that Mormons denied

³³⁸ Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, And His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 181.

³³⁹ See, for example, *Geauga Gazette*, May 24, 1831; *Philadelphia Album*, May 28, 1831; *Berkshire Journal*, June 2, 1831; *Unitarian Monitor*, June 9, 1831; *Salem Gazette*, June 24, 1831; *Evangelical Magazine*, June 25, 1831; *Gospel Anchor*, July 2, 1831.

³⁴⁰ “Caution,” *Huron Reflector*, June 20, 1831, 3; italics and emphases in original. For more about debt and dissolution of marriage, see Claire L. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

medical attention even in the direst circumstances. This point pierced the heart of Mormonism's founder. The months of May, June, and July in 1831 presented what must have been an especially painful surprise when Joseph and Emma Smith opened their papers. It rapaciously reported,

The wife of the prophet Smith hardly escaped [dying in childbirth]; she was in labor three days, during which time they tried their spells in vain, at last they called an accoucheur, and she was delivered of the dead bodies of two fine boys. The mother barely survived."³⁴¹

The editor was careful not to miss the fact that Mormons claimed the gift of healing and added this flippant, poignant example to regularly printed examples of failed Mormon miracles. What new wounds did it cause, particularly for Emma, as it was reprinted in at least four different exchange newspapers in four different states including Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts?³⁴² As for his wife's feelings, Smith left for Missouri to dedicate Zion in June 1831 and was probably unaware of the article's frequency and duration. Editors were intent on notifying the public of their agendas of Mormon fanaticism, credulity, and dishonesty by emphasizing the fact that Mormon beliefs hazarded the lives of even his own members.

Well-recognized among nineteenth-century American newspapers is the Baltimore *Niles' Weekly Register*. Its July 16, 1831, issue included an eight-page supplement to its typical sixteen-page format that enabled the publishers "to dispose of a

³⁴¹ "The Mormon Fanaticism," *Salem Gazette*, June 24, 1831, 2.

³⁴² It is not inconceivable that Emma's family, only approximately 128 miles away, read a similar article. Although strong feelings existed between her family and the Mormons, a family member hoping to keep abreast of the distrusted sect would not have found it difficult to find information in the papers. Articles in the newspaper exchange traveled hundreds of miles and even as far as the Sandwich Islands in the 1830s and 1840s.

large quantity of current matter”—among which was an article reprinted from the exchange on the Mormons. Hezekiah Niles, as with other editors, was also interested in the flocking of deluded people to “the promised land,” whose primary recruits were “from among the lazy and the worthless classes of society.” The Buffalo ice miracle was included without additional detail but was followed by the incredulous idea that “some of them affect a power even to raise the dead.” The article concluded with a thought rising in the papers in 1831 that “the chiefs of those people appear to exempt themselves from *labor*, and herein is, probably, the grand object for which *they* have established this new religion.”³⁴³ Editors established their agendas by shaping the image of a lazy, corrupt Mormon leadership and miracle-obsessed membership.

Rational or National?

A careful reading of the primary sources brought to light a fascinating instance of the colossal potential of the smallest printed jot or tittle. The June 21, 1831, Painesville, Ohio, *Geauga Gazette* published a twenty-nine-line article bemoaning that the “infatuated people are again in motion.” The article spoke of the pecuniary imbecility of faithful followers and the editor shook his head that the Mormons “still persist in their power to work miracles.” Then came the fateful sentence: “These assertions are made by men heretofore considered rational men, and men of truth.”³⁴⁴

The article, of no real accord, entered the exchange and was duplicated at least thirteen more times over the next four months through Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island,

³⁴³ “Mormonism,” July 16, 1831, 353; italics in original.

³⁴⁴ “The Mormonites,” *Geauga Gazette*, June 21, 1831, 2.

New York, Connecticut, Arkansas, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The import and potential disaster for the Mormons came a month later in the *Norristown (PA) Register and Sentinel* of July 20, 1831. In setting the type, for unknown reasons, the typesetter replaced just one letter, the “r” of “rational” to an “n,” thereby changing the word to “national.” Thus, the modified sentence read: “These assertions are made by men heretofore considered *national* men.”³⁴⁵

The nearly microscopic difference of an *r* and an *n* with hand-set type, hand-inked on handmade paper is staggering and begs a number of questions. Was the switch intentional or accidental? Was the exchange copy used as an original smudged, not fully inked, damaged, or wet causing it to be difficult to read? Or, was it a physical error such as when the previous paper’s type was redistributed into the case, an “n” accidentally returned to the “r” box and, although the typesetter intentionally pulled an “r,” instead, unknowingly withdrew an “n.”³⁴⁶ The reason will probably never be known.

³⁴⁵ “The Mormonites,” *Norristown Register and Sentinel*, July 20, 1831, 2; italics added.

³⁴⁶ The “practical directions for conducting every department in [a printing] office” of T. C. Hansard’s 1825 *Typographia: An Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the Art of Printing* includes cautions to printers of events and practices within the highly-detailed work of setting and distributing type that offers additional possibilities for how “rational” was changed to “national.” For example, it warned of the “impropriety of permitting a young beginner to distribute [the type] before he has made himself acquainted with the boxes” during which type was likely to be distributed incorrectly. Perhaps the letter *n* was placed with the letters *r* by a novice. Or, even skilled tradesmen might accidentally drop a handful of type creating a “pie,” a mass of type mingled indiscriminately. Dirty, slippery, worn, abused, or nonreadable type, or hasty distribution makes one prone to errors. If it was an inadvertent switch, typesetters became “so completely acquainted with the ... type, as to know the meaning of the word he takes from his handful, [even] with the cursory view he may have of it, while in the act of lifting it.” Thus, whoever set the type was more than likely not to have seen the mistake in the rapid process of human automation. See T. C. Hansard, *Typographia: An Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the Art of Printing* (London: Baldwin,

More important was the potential effect of the minuscule appendage. By 1831, Mormons were not surprised to be called irrational. However, in a country less than sixty years past its revolutionary war where grandfathers, husbands, fathers, and sons bled and died for democracy and unprecedented freedom of conscience, not being a national people or a national individual was inexcusable and unbearable. Moreover, agenda setting founding theorist Maxwell McCombs specified that the strength of mass media agenda setting is multiplied by a person's "need for orientation"—the need for one's cognitive compartmentalization of new information, such as a strange religious sect not easily placed within existing mental confines of acceptance, tolerance, or rejection. For a reader whose need for orientation on Mormonism was high, a blank slate of sorts, reading of Mormon oddity now compounded by reported apathy for country framed an indelible, long-term antagonism toward the religion's adherents. Then, each succeeding confirming evidence of Mormon fanaticism further ingrained an identity susceptible to any accusation.

Careful attention was given to each version of the thirteen exchange reprints to see if any others transposed the *r* and *n*, including the six articles that followed the *Norristown (PA) Register*. None of the other editors printed the mistaken "national"—signifying that they worked from the original, apparently readable, Painesville, Ohio, *Geauga Gazette* text or from some other correct exchange article. Perhaps if additional Pennsylvania articles are discovered from presses located within reach of the *Norristown Register*, it may be revealed that the *Register* did have an extended effect on the image of Mormonism by its inadvertent or intentional change. The Mormons did not know how

Cradock, and Joy, 1825), 590–92.

narrowly they missed potentially violent problems of doubted patriotism all because of a microgram of ink.

Precipitous Firsts

The year 1831 held firsts for the Mormons that teetered on the edge of helping or hindering the fledgling faith in the minds of Americans who were forming their understanding of the Mormons. The year began and ended with two formidable authors whose agendas were positioned to be heard perhaps more than any other, and summer closed with two scrutinies as early American investigative journalism explored its place in the press.

Alexander Campbell's *Delusions*

February 1831 saw the first comprehensive, methodical excoriations of the Book of Mormon, the key to Smith's veracity or fallacy. If the book was a translation of an ancient scripture, his prophetic claims were difficult to discount. On the other hand, if the Book of Mormon could be proven false, then Smith was a false prophet. Thus, the first anti-Mormon pamphlet in Mormon history was also the first formal anti-Book of Mormon pamphlet printed with the agenda to reveal Mormon dishonesty. It was written by reformist clergyman Alexander Campbell. Campbell had not taken lightly the defection of one of his principal preachers, Sidney Rigdon, and many of his flock to Mormonism, and the source of Rigdon's conversion, the Book of Mormon, bore the brunt of his attack.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Richard L. Bushman observed that Campbell took the Book of Mormon "seriously." For his comments on Campbell and Rigdon, see Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 89–90. Historian Stephen C. Harper wrote that, "By 1835, however, Mormonism had already surpassed Campbellism in claiming that God had

The excoriation, which Campbell entitled “Delusions,” was printed in his highly recognized Bethany, Virginia, *Millennial Harbinger* on February 7, 1831, and was a powerful influence on convincing readers that despite Smith’s growing Kirtland populace, its foundation was deception. It contained a surprisingly succinct summary of the 590-page Book of Mormon. Campbell’s most well-known criticism was that Smith endeavored to answer in the Book of Mormon

every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies;— infant baptism, ... the trinity, ... the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, ... the general resurrection, eternal punishment, ... the question of free masonry [*sic*], republican government, and the rights of man.”³⁴⁸

Newspapers such as the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* and *Cleveland Herald* anticipated the opportunity to reprint the convincing review “from the able pen of Alexander Campbell [which] unequivocally and triumphantly sets the question of the divine authenticity of the ‘Book’ forever at rest, to every *rational* mind.”³⁴⁹ Campbell printed *Delusions* in pamphlet form and the text was still circulating in the newspaper exchange at least eighteen months later. One newspaper, the *Essex Gazette*, of Haverhill, Massachusetts, even printed it twice, consuming the entire front page for two consecutive weeks.³⁵⁰

intervened directly to restore his only valid church through Joseph Smith as a living oracle, claims Campbell could never match.” Steven C. Harper, “Missionaries in the American Religious Marketplace: Mormon Proselyting in the 1830s,” *Journal of Mormon History* 24, no. 2 (1998): 2.

³⁴⁸ Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *Millennial Harbinger*, February 7, 1831, 93; spelling and capitalization in original.

³⁴⁹ *Painesville Telegraph*, March 1, 1831, 3; emphasis in original; see also “Summary,” *Cleveland Herald*, March 10, 1831, 3.

³⁵⁰ See “Delusions. An Analysis of the Book of Mormon,” *Essex Gazette*,

In addition to proving Smith's sham, the force with which Campbell attacked Mormonism also caught American attention. Bitterness between the factions became sufficiently noteworthy to surface in the papers. An article printed on March 22, 1831, in the Brandon *Vermont Telegraph* reprinted a letter written to the Utica, New York, *Baptist Register* on the subject: "'Campbellism with us,' wrote the author, 'is on the decline. Many of its votaries have embraced Mormonism, or the new revelation. The war has changed its appearance, and seems now to be between Campbellites and Mormonites.'"³⁵¹

Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon had aroused the ire of one of the most recognized religionists of the time, which resulted in a landslide of damaging texts against his fledgling Kirtland church. No fewer than seventeen non-Mormon articles made mention of Campbell when printing on some aspect of Mormonism in 1831. When Smith lamented in his 1838 history that his "circumstances in life [were] such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, Yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against [him] and create a hot [bitter] persecution," he may well have had in mind such persons as Alexander Campbell.³⁵²

Campbell was not the only writer to systematically analyze the Book of Mormon. Additional editors purveyed their disproof of the central Mormon text used by Mormon

September 8, 1832, 1–2; "Delusions. An Analysis of the Book of Mormon," *Essex Gazette*, September 15, 1832, 1–2.

³⁵¹ "Mormonites," *Vermont Telegraph*, March 22, 1831, 103.

³⁵² Smith, "History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834]," 4; capitalization in original. See also Joseph Smith-History 1:22. Although Smith was speaking of his adolescence, as many as eighteen years had passed and his feelings had been seasoned with encounters with those such as Campbell.

missionaries to convert and collect the unsuspecting to Kirtland. The editors of the Hudson, Ohio, *Observer and Telegraph* conceded to clear up the doubts of a reader “solicitous to know the truth” concerning the “volume of silly impostures” and presented a five-point discourse defining why new revelation was impossible.³⁵³ A portion of the article was reprinted in the Hartford *Connecticut Observer* two weeks later.³⁵⁴ An increasing number of intuitive editors knew that if the “keystone” of Mormonism, its core Mormon document, the Book of Mormon, could be discredited, the Church, its prophet, and all else would crumble.³⁵⁵ Editors placed the topic of the Book of Mormon before their readers in no fewer than 303 articles while the Mormons settled in Kirtland in 1831 and 1832.

A Boost to the Book of Mormon

At least one editor exhibited a rare degree of professionalism and objectivity when reporting about the Book of Mormon, an uncharacteristic departure from what most editors presented to the public. Controversial freethinker and social reformer Francis (Fanny) Wright published a high-profile New York City newspaper, the *Free Enquirer*, edited by Robert Dale Owen. The September 10, 1831, issue included a nearly full-page

³⁵³ “The Golden Bible,” *Observer and Telegraph*, February 10, 1831.

³⁵⁴ See “The Golden Bible,” *Connecticut Observer*, February 28, 1831, 36.

³⁵⁵ On Sunday, November 28, 1841, it is recorded in Smith’s history that in a meeting with the leading council of the Church, Smith said, “I told the brethren that the book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the key stone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.” Joseph Smith Jr., “History, 1838-1856, Volume C-1 [2 November 1838-31 July 1842]” (Nauvoo, IL, November 28, 1841), 1255, The Joseph Smith Papers; spelling and capitalization in original.

“comparison between the Book of Mormon and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, or the Golden Bible vs. the Holy Bible” written by Owen’s brother. “After a pretty careful perusal,” he reported,

I am of opinion that ... the Golden Bible will bear a very good comparison with the holy Bible. I find nothing in the former inconsistent with the doctrines or opposed to a belief in the latter; on the contrary, the one seems to corroborate the other; and I can discover no good reason why the generality of Christians should scoff, as I have generally found them do, and hoot at the idea of believing in such a monstrously absurd book.”³⁵⁶

These conclusions are surprising considering how many editors were reprinting opposite claims that Smith had cobbled together the Book of Mormon by plagiarizing the Bible as evidence of their agenda of affirming Mormon dishonesty.³⁵⁷ As of the time of this study, it does not appear that the positive article on the Book of Mormon in the New York *Free Enquirer* was reproduced in the exchange.

James Gordon Bennett

Mormonism was the subject of an early form of investigative journalism in the summer of 1831 when budding journalist James Gordon Bennett decided on a tour of upstate New York. Bennett scratched notes on a variety of topics including the Erie Canal, Masonry and Anti-Masonry, and the New York banking system. As a newspaperman, he was well aware of the intriguing and sellable topic of Mormonism and was eager to postulate his interpretations of Mormonism to his subscribers and all else to

³⁵⁶ Wm. Owen, “Communications,” *Free Enquirer*, September 10, 1831, 3; spelling and capitalization in original.

³⁵⁷ One of the most highly organized attacks on the Book of Mormon, including a comprehensive list of alleged plagiarisms, is found in “Mormonism,” *Zion’s Watchman*, February 3, 1838, 2. The editorial is approximately 7,860 words long, the equivalent of about twenty double-spaced pages on 8.5” x 11” paper.

whom the exchange would carry them. His collection of notes was rewritten into a two-part feature story that appeared in the *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer* on August 31 and September 1, 1831. Bennett's articles included familiar Mormon themes such as the loss of some portion of the gold plates; however, his "eagerness to break into print before he had all his facts straight is not untypical of his own career nor of that of the propensities of leading journalists of his age."³⁵⁸

The agenda-setting effect of his article can be measured in its reprinting in the exchange. At least twelve additional newspapers across seven states reprinted his "authentic" firsthand story nearly verbatim, and others based on his writing are easily recognized because of Bennett's misspelling of Sidney Rigdon's last name as "Rangdon." The "*Mormon Religion*," he resolved, is "one of the strangest pieces of fanaticism to which the ill-advised and the worst regulated ambition and folly of certain portions of the clergy in Western New York ever gave birth. What a lesson it ought to teach us!"³⁵⁹ Bennett's concluding question demonstrated that there was a lesson or agenda behind what he selected for printing and how he crafted it. In Kirtland, Smith must have recoiled at the inaccuracies being spread by Bennett's distant, high-profile, New York paper, but had no press on which to defend his version of his history.

The Fruits of Apostasy

The year 1831 ended with an unexpected, counterintuitive boon for Smith's desire to increase his flock. It was the first time an apostate Mormon engaged the press to

³⁵⁸ Arrington, "James Gordon Bennett's 1831 Report on 'The Mormonites,'" 8.

³⁵⁹ James Gordon Bennett as reprinted in "Mormon Religion," *Vermont Gazette*, September 18, 1831, 1; italics and punctuation in original.

antagonize his former faith. The disenfranchised Ohio convert Ezra Booth wrote nine derogatory letters on Mormonism that were published in the Ravenna *Ohio Star* forty-four miles south of Kirtland from October 13 to December 8, 1831. The *Star* was one of only a few newspapers in the area surrounding the remote Kirtland. Its editors were thrilled with the scoop and the piercing opportunity the windfall offered to inform those in the region about its new occupants.

Booth's letters centered on his dissatisfaction with Smith's dedicatory trip to Zion in June and July 1831. Booth had accompanied Smith and other leading Mormons with grand expectations of the role he would play in the millenarian rites. He, instead, returned disappointed in the temporal traits he saw in Smith. His second letter denounced the alleged idea that the Book of Mormon was the "test by which every man's fate is to be tried"—that those who reject it "are threatened with eternal damnation," and shall be "swept off as with the besom of destruction."³⁶⁰ It reemphasized the oft-published claim that Mormons considered the Book of Mormon far superior to the Bible, an incriminating accusation in the Bible-loving America.

The letters initially had a dire effect. A concerned Mormon convert wrote to Oliver Cowdery, second to Smith in the Church's hierarchy, describing Booth's letters as giving the Book of Mormon such a coloring and appearance of falsehood that observers

³⁶⁰ Ezra Booth, "Mormonism--No. II," *Ohio Star*, October 20, 1831. Nineteenth-century editors used the double hyphen as opposed to the modern em dash. As with spelling of the day, they have been left as found in the original text throughout the dissertation and the footnotes. A more detailed description of Booth's relationship with the Mormons can be found in Mark L. Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), chaps. 22–23.

worried Mormonism would be overthrown by them.³⁶¹ The *Star*'s agenda setting had worked. Booth's letters were reprinted in the exchange primarily, it appears, by three newspapers in Ohio, but as far as one hundred miles from Kirtland. The letters made another appearance two years later in the first formal anti-Mormon book, *Mormonism Unveiled*, published by Smith's nearby nemesis, *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* newspaper editor Eber D. Howe.

The effect of the letters was potent enough that on December 1, 1831, Smith received a revelation from the Lord that called him and his leading fellows to leave their work of retranslating the Bible to go on "a mission for a season." They were to "confound [their] enemies ... both in public and in private" and were promised that although the detractors may "bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord," they "shall be confounded."³⁶² The Campbellite-turned-Mormon Rigdon challenged Booth and another apostate, Symonds Ryder,³⁶³ on the pages of the same Ravenna *Ohio Star* newspaper to a written or oral debate in December 1831 and January 1832. Booth and Ryder declined, claiming "the public anxiety [had] long since been relieved."³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ See Ambrose Palmer, "Brother O. Cowdery," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, January 1835, 61–62. For more on Ezra Booth's letters, see Dennis Rowley, "The Ezra Booth Letters," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 133–37; Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 177–78.

³⁶² "Revelation, 1 December 1831," in *Revelation Book 2* (Kirtland, OH, n.d.), 11–12.

³⁶³ There is some disagreement on the spelling of Symonds Ryder's name, and Mormon lore includes a story of Ryder's disaffection from the Church over an instance of its misspelling. Ryder's name is found multiple times in the newspapers; thus, for the purposes of this dissertation, it will be spelled as it was printed in the press.

³⁶⁴ "For the Ohio Star," *Ohio Star*, December 29, 1831, 3.

To the surprise of many, Mormon journals noted an increase in interest in Mormonism as a result of the letters in the *Star* and after about six weeks, Smith declared, “we did much towards allaying the excited feelings which were growing out of the scandalous letters.”³⁶⁵ As for Ezra Booth, Smith did not mince words. Booth’s published letters, “by their coloring, falsity, and vain calculations to overthrow the work of the Lord the exposed his weakness, wickedness and folly, and left him a monument of his own shame for the world to wonder at.”³⁶⁶ Historian Richard L. Bushman observed, “Booth then dropped from sight. Only his letters ... remained to mark his trail across Joseph’s life.”³⁶⁷ The letters, nevertheless, were all enterprising editors needed to serve their own purposes of shaping readers’ thoughts and conversations.

1831 Closes

Mormonism’s first year in Kirtland was pelted with 331 articles, 62 percent of which were critical, 27 percent were neutral, 1.5 percent were positive, and one article was sympathetic. The equivalent of ten new newspapers printed on Mormonism each month totaling 124 different newspapers in twenty states and seventy-nine cities. The most common topic throughout the non-Mormon articles was the Book of Mormon—180 articles comprising 54 percent made some reference to it in 1831. Fittingly, the year closed with an unintended reaffirmation of the unstoppable spread of Mormonism’s book.

³⁶⁵ Smith, “History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834],” 179; see also Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine & Covenants*, 247–49.

³⁶⁶ Smith, “History, 1838-1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834],” 154.

³⁶⁷ Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 177.

The *Philadelphia Album and Ladies' Literary Gazette* of December 18, 1831, marked the swelling deluge with emphatic concern: "The book which these men have pretended to translate from these sheets of gold has been printed, and they are now busily engaged in scattering copies of it throughout the country."³⁶⁸

Lackluster 1832

As the Mormon settlement solidified in its second year, interest and condemnation in American newspapers flagged. Both the total number of articles and the percentage of those disparaging Mormonism dropped 60 percent in 1832. Perhaps this was a result of "the mood and temper of the American public, its willingness to entertain a broad range of social and economic possibilities" including "big plans of all kinds," not the least of which were religious and utopian communities.³⁶⁹ Nevertheless, discontentment with Smith personally leapt from the ink-stained fingers of editors to the fists of a midnight mob.

Tar and Feathers

Sometime in April 1832, the *Warren (OH) News-Letter*, approximately nineteen miles from where Smith resided, reported that Smith and Rigdon had been tarred and feathered. Two versions of the sparsely detailed article slipped into the exchange and were reprinted in at least six more papers circuiting northern Ohio and reaching farther than six hundred miles east to New York, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. "On the

³⁶⁸ "The Book of Gold," *Philadelphia Album*, December 18, 1831, 405.

³⁶⁹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 296.

night of the 24th,” the papers reprinted, “twenty-five or thirty persons in disguise, entered the apartments of Smith & Rigdom [*sic*], leaders of Mormonism [and] carried them from their beds and tarred and feathered them.”³⁷⁰ The information was not uncommon to readers’ eyes. Americans of the 1830s had been inundated with reports of the “contagion of rioting.”³⁷¹

The only mark of interest in the mobbing was the title “*Outrage*” prefacing some of the accounts. The *Portsmouth (NH) Journal* alone ventured additional commentary: “These Mormonites are no doubt very Ignorant and fanatical, but those who applied the tar and feathers are much greater fanatics.”³⁷² Only four of 124 articles in 1832 broached a semblance of a sympathetic stance. Scholars have debated the reasons behind the vicious attack that included an attempt to poison Smith and to castrate him. It was most likely a combination of offenses, political or economic dissatisfaction, and religious differences and intolerance that were fanned by rumors and inaccuracies found in the press. Smith bore both physical and emotional scars of the attack the rest of his life.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ “Outrage,” *Genius of Temperance*, May 23, 1832, 1, spelling in original. See also, “Outrage,” *Huron Reflector*, May 1, 1832, 3; “Outrage [Sic],” *Manufacturers’ and Farmers’ Journal*, May 21, 1832, 2; *Vermont Gazette*, May 22, 1832, 3; *Portsmouth Journal and Rockingham Gazette*, May 26, 1832, 1.

³⁷¹ Gilje, *Rioting in America*, 184.

³⁷² May 26, 1832, 1, capitalization in original.

³⁷³ See Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 180–120; Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 41–43; Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 118–21.

Mormon Printing

The Evening and the Morning Star

By the time Smith and his followers were settling into Kirtland at the dawning of the 1830s, the American Bible Society (ABS) had resolved to distribute a Bible to every family of the nation of three million households and had already infused the country with more than one million volumes. Meanwhile, the American Tract Society (ATS) paralleled the ABS's "General Supply" with its own "Systematic Monthly Distribution" plan, flooding homes in 1829-1831 with some fifteen million pamphlets.³⁷⁴ At the same time, more than eight thousand newspapers in the 1830s churned the thoughts of Americans.³⁷⁵ Historian David J. Whitaker's observation that "Joseph Smith lived and moved in a print culture"³⁷⁶ might well be an understatement.

At a time when the deluge of religious tracts equated to no fewer than five pages for every man, woman, and child, and 445 known newspaper articles had already addressed some aspect of Smith's religion (a number he could not have conceived), Smith must have yearned for his own printing presence. The Lord confirmed the idea by July 1831, directing experienced printer and convert William W. Phelps to "be planted in

³⁷⁴ See Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*, 83–86.

³⁷⁵ The Library of Congress, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities, has been commissioned to "a long-term effort to develop an Internet-based, searchable database of U. S. newspapers with descriptive information and select digitization of historic pages." Over eleven million individual pages from the year 1690 to the present can be accessed on the website as well as biographical information on tens of thousands (and increasing continually) of newspapers. See "Chronicling America « Library of Congress."

³⁷⁶ Whitaker, "The Web of Print: Toward a History of the Book in Early Mormon Culture," 10.

this place [Jackson County, Missouri], and be established as a printer unto the church.”³⁷⁷ That realization began to take shape in the fall of 1831. Though painfully distant from the prophet in Kirtland, the Mormon millennial city in Jackson County, Missouri, was to become the hub of Mormon printing.

Phelps’s press was soon to print the first Mormon newspaper, and its arrival to provide the means of the agenda of anesthetizing three-years’ potent poisons already in circulation about the Church was highly anticipated. Smith, his family, Phelps, and other key Mormons exulted in the spring of 1832 when the American press took note of the prospectus of their divinely sanctioned paper, *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Independence, MO).³⁷⁸ The *Philadelphia Album*’s sixty-seven-line notice was typical of the time—notably neutral, with fifty-six lines extracted directly and without alteration from the opening paragraph of the Mormon prospectus. Its tongue-in-cheek conclusion, nevertheless, elucidated the unashamed Mormon agenda of distributing doctrine that underpinned their paper: “These Mormonite sages are about to pour a flood of light upon the world.”³⁷⁹ The floodgates of Mormon printing opened with the June 1832 issue and were quickly and forcibly dammed only a year later with mobs that destroyed the printing office and eventually forced the Mormons from the state.

³⁷⁷ *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, OH: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), sec. XXVII vs. 5, p. 154.

³⁷⁸ Bibliographer Peter Crawley noted that no copy of the prospectus is known to have survived. The *Star* was reestablished in Kirtland starting in December 1833 and included the text of the prospectus as part of the first issue. See Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, 1:32.

³⁷⁹ “A ‘Mormonite’ Newspaper,” *Philadelphia Album*, March 31, 1832, 101.

Printed Posturing

The Mormons rejoiced at the prospect of printing their agenda of rebutting the country's coarse perceptions of them. But, were their words sufficient to achieve their desires to evoke the search for truth and to provoke responses from the Gentile press? The answer to the latter, at the least, is yes. The *Ohio Atlas* (Elyria, OH), 760 miles from the Mormon press in Independence, Missouri, and fifty-one miles from the still press-less Kirtland, reprinted an announcement from a nonextant *Providence (RI) Journal*: "We are in the receipt of the second number of a Mormonite newspaper, published at Independence, Missouri, the settlement of that most absurd and singular sect. It is called the 'Evening and the Morning Star'—and is handsomely printed, in the form and style of our largest bibles." Showing that Smith's new scripture had not gone unnoticed, both the *Journal* and the *Atlas* explained that "the first page is devoted to the revelations from the Prophet Mormon, and Extracts from the laws for the Government of the church."³⁸⁰ The potency of Mormon print and the posturing of and between presses had begun.

The Vision

Most prominent among the printed reactions to the newly broadcast Mormon texts in 1832 were those concerning one of Smith's Kirtland manifestations succinctly named, "the Vision." While contemplating the eternal destiny of the soul and its assignment to happiness or misery in the next life, Smith and his companions saw a vision on February 16, 1832. The *Mormon Star*, the only means of Mormon publication, recounted Smith's description of the vision according to one of the four Mormon agendas, distributing

³⁸⁰ "Mormonism," *Ohio Atlas and Lorain County Gazette*, October 11, 1832, 2; capitalization in original; see also "Mormonism," *Guernsey Times*, May 11, 1833, 2.

doctrine: “Our eyes were opened, and our understandings were enlightened, so as to see and understand the things of God; even things which were from before the world was.” Then followed a vision of Jesus Christ, of the devil, and the consignment of deceased souls to “everlasting punishment” with the “sons of perdition,” or to three degrees of heavenly glories, namely Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial.³⁸¹

The reception of the revisionist view of heaven and hell both in and out of the Church was, however, less than enthusiastic even among Smith’s flock in Kirtland. The indomitable Brigham Young, who was baptized in 1832 and joined Smith in Kirtland in 1833, readily admitted the cognitive dissonance it caused.³⁸² Smith hoped that the mere sight of the printed celestial principle would engender unity, another of the Mormon agendas. He found, instead, “that where there are contentions, and unbelief in the sacred things communicated to the saints by revelation, that discord, hardness, jealousies, and numberless evils will inevitably insue.”³⁸³ Smith became concerned at the attention and results of the printed spread of the Vision, which continued in 1833. His purpose of setting the unique, hopefully unifying vision of the afterlife before his flock began to turn

³⁸¹ “A Vision,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, July 1832, 10–11.

³⁸² “You can understand,” Young announced at an 1852 conference in the Utah Territory, “that many things which were revealed through Joseph, came in contact with our own prejudices; we did not know how to understand them.... After all, my traditions were such, that when the Vision came first to me, it was so directly contrary and opposed to my former education, I said, wait a little: I did not reject it; but I could not understand it.” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, 1853, 30–31. Young used this experience as a prelude to the discord he expected while announcing another of Smith’s pretentious revelations—plural marriage. For other reactions to the vision, see Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations*, chap. 26.

³⁸³ Joseph Smith Jr., “Letter to Church Leaders in Geneseo, New York, 23 November 1833,” November 23, 1833, 1–3, Joseph Smith Papers; punctuation, capitalization, and grammar in original.

against him.

Neither were American editors fond of the fanciful postmortal embellishments. No fewer than thirteen newspapers across five states and the Arkansas territory took exception to the “pompous” change to the netherworld. Editors of exchange papers placed before their readers a lengthy exposition by a “Reverend B. Bixly” that wandered in and out of fanciful descriptions and criticisms, including Smith’s profession “to talk with angels, visit the third heavens, and converse with Christ.”³⁸⁴ Others were more interested in the vision as content of the press of a “singular sect” of which they were skeptical and, moreover, of the worrisome impassioned Mormon editor that exclaimed in the pages of the *Star* that the vision was “the greatest news that was ever published to man—showing the economy of God in prepairing mansions for men.”³⁸⁵ The precept was not so much the issue as the fanatics who now had a press to propagate it.

References to the Vision continued haphazardly in the exchange. The thorny results caused Smith to recalculate the position of the Vision and to counsel missionaries not to discuss it when proselytizing.³⁸⁶ Over-enthusiasm concerning the Vision had the power to overwhelm potential converts. The highly-anticipated benefit of broadcasting Mormon beliefs in print also posed precipitous perils.

³⁸⁴ “The Mormons,” *Northampton Courier*, April 24, 1833, 2. The name of Mr. Bixly had many iterations in the exchange but was most likely “Pixley.” See B. Pixley, “Intelligence Respecting Mormonites,” *Journal and Telegraph*, November 17, 1832, 204; “The Mormons,” *Ohio Atlas and Lorain County Gazette*, December 6, 1832, 2.

³⁸⁵ “Mormonism,” *United States Gazette*, September 22, 1832, 1; spelling in original; see also “Mormonism,” *Adams Sentinel*, October 2, 1832, 2; “Mormonism,” October 11, 1832, 2; “Mormonism,” May 11, 1833, 2.

³⁸⁶ “History, 1838-1856, Volume B-1 [1 September 1834-2 November 1838]” n.d., 762, The Joseph Smith Papers; capitalization and spelling in original.

Conclusion

Mormonism's move to Kirtland, Ohio, was heavily annotated in the American press. No fewer than 456 articles were written on Mormonism from 1831 to 1832 in 151 newspapers in seventy-six cities and throughout twenty states and territories (of twenty-four in the Union). The most frequent topics editors spread on the pages of their papers by which they created, shaped, or changed readers' perspectives of the Mormons included: Mormon relocation to Kirtland; Smith's God/nation prioritization; failed Mormon healing miracles; a typographical error concerning Mormon nationalism; refuting the Book of Mormon; the effects of apostasy; the first Mormon paper; and, a vision of celestial glories. Despite its newness and the fact that its peculiarities were primarily its precepts, nearly 83 percent of the articles had an overriding critical tone; 22 percent of the editorials reported with a neutral approach; and both positive and sympathetic editorials comprised 1 percent each of the articles. Ohio newspapers printed no fewer than 154 times, or 34 percent of the commentary on them—52 percent of which were critical. New York expended 87 articles on their departure and Ohio development, which comprised 19 percent of the defining text presented to American subscribers.

Five of the six non-Mormon agendas are evident in the beginning years of 1831 and 1832: revealing Mormon dishonesty; emphasizing Mormonism's fanaticism; underscoring their credulity and gullibility; alerting readers to the growing Mormon power; and vilification. The Mormons were unaware of how widespread editors' agenda setting brought them to the forefront of readers' minds and shaped their image as their Ohio roots deepened and their branches reached to Missouri. Without a press for the nearly three years since Mormonism's inception, the Mormons were powerless in the

mass market of religion to portray or correct the image being spread to the far reaches of the country. French statesman Alexis de Tocqueville observed of the undertow of American presses that “when once the Americans have taken up an idea, whether it be well or ill-founded, nothing is more difficult than to eradicate it from their minds.”³⁸⁷

The Mormons rejoiced at the advent of their first paper. Doctrinally dense, it was initially leery of engaging other papers in printed debates common to nineteenth-century print culture. Nevertheless, it entered the fray with tenuous steps as American editors shifted from simple sarcasm to deliberate vilification and the Mormons began to shape their responsive agenda. Three of the four Mormon agendas were found in their paper during these years: to dispel, correct, or offset incorrect perception; relay church doctrines and structure; and unify scattered members.

The press of Mormonism’s beginnings in 1829 and 1830 was critical and quick to denounce the new religious movement with mocking epithets. However, the national press and, particularly the Ohio press, in 1831 began to make a subtle shift in the casting of their agendas. One such agenda was vilification. For the first time, Mormons were portrayed as a cultural enemy that would require eventual action as opposed to mere jesting or taunting.

Believers in a “miserable production,” guided by revelation from a “prolific prophet” were a silly annoyance and served as pitiful commentary on the plight of American naïveté. Once they become neighbors, however, especially in community-changing numbers, they were no longer purely bothersome, but began to be enemies of the status quo. The Painesville, Ohio, *Geauga Gazette*, which printed these descriptions

³⁸⁷ de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1875, 1:187.

of the ludicrous Mormons in 1831, also began shaping the Mormon cultural villain with its introduction of population statistics. More than just a passing notice of a band of fanatical brethren, the *Gazette* carefully validated its mortal concern of the now alarming and growing group by claiming that the Mormons, themselves, asserted their adherents numbered four hundred. Then, verification came, it printed, in “a conversation a few days since with a gentleman from Kirtland, well informed, and every way concerned to give us the truth” who assured the concerned editor that a mere portion of the Mormons in that vicinity was no less than two hundred souls. The *Gazette*’s warning continued: “We doubt not then that their whole number in this county” and the next are “at least four hundred.”³⁸⁸ In actuality, Smith and his followers numbered about fifty-five in 1830 and the non-Mormon population of Kirtland was slightly more than one thousand. In 1832, the Mormons increased to about one hundred.³⁸⁹

The impact of the *Gazette*’s alarm is noteworthy considering the article was reprinted in the exchange in eighteen newspapers dispersed through fourteen cities covering nine states. The warning was made louder when, as the article was copied, changed, and enlarged, it continued to report bigger and bigger numbers, magnifying the Mormon presence. For example, less than three weeks after the original article, the

³⁸⁸ An original copy of the *Geauga Gazette* article is not yet extant; nevertheless, sufficient evidence is provided through its reproduction through the exchange that it existed. These quotes are taken from the first known reprinting only four days later in Ashtabula, Ohio, approximately thirty miles from Painesville, Ohio. “The Golden Bible, or The Book of Mormon,” 3.

³⁸⁹ See “Kirtland Township, Ohio – Place,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/place/kirtland-township-ohio?highlight=Kirtland%20Township,%20Ohio>; “Encyclopedia of Mormonism,” sec. Kirtland, Ohio, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/EoM/id/4391>.

Hartford *Connecticut Mirror* added its own statistical growth of the sect to increase the *Gazette*'s effect. "Three or four months since," it began, "we saw ... that *one or two* persons had" found a gold book by the voice of God. Twelve lines later, "*Three or four* ignorant and illiterate inhabitants" believed the book. After the Mormons moved to Kirtland in the next phrase, "*seven or eight* respectable individuals had fallen in with them," but, readers were then informed that the *Geauga Gazette* (Painesville, OH) was concerned that "these deluded fanatics are daily adding to their numbers, and that, *as a body, they are already quite formidable*."³⁹⁰ By May, only three months later, twelve papers in the exchange exclaimed under the title "The March of Mormonism" that "there are now probably a *thousand disciples* of the Mormon creed!"³⁹¹ Ninety-two articles in 1831—nearly 30 percent of those written—published Mormon statistics. The vilification classification still required much to incite action against the settling inhabitants; nevertheless, the vilifying agenda of inflaming readers' fears and making the Mormons a threat in person began as their numbers grew on paper.

Vilification attributes diabolical motives to foes who threaten the basic needs and values of core identities. Four newspapers shared an article in this time frame that castigated a soon-to-be Mormon apostle, Parley P. Pratt, for eluding an arresting constable. "He fled into the woods and is now at large, to deceive and lead silly women & more silly men astray," the account criminalized.³⁹² Webster's 1828 dictionary defined

³⁹⁰ "Fanaticism," *Connecticut Mirror*, February 19, 1831, 3; italics added.

³⁹¹ "The March of Mormonism," March 16, 1831, 2; punctuation in original but italics added.

³⁹² The original article entitled "Beware of Imposters" was printed in a nonextant paper, the *Milan Free Press* but was reprinted in the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph*, which

silly as “weak or helpless; destitute of ordinary strength of mind”³⁹³—etymology specific to the victims of vilification. At least one paper reprinted the phrase but added two more key Mormons to the list of unconscionable characters and deepened the vulnerability of the “weak and silly” women and men, “whose minds are shrouded in a mist of ignorance.”³⁹⁴ Portraying the Mormons, particularly leaders, as preying on the weak was an essential part in shaping the cultural enemy. The *New York Mercury* went further with the sickening thought that “families are in danger of being beguiled and severed by this specious heresy.”³⁹⁵

A cultural enemy requires a moral agent to fight its evil. It also clarifies the target. Thus was the *Huron Reflector* (Norwalk, OH) of July 4, 1831.

It is verily a melancholy spectacle to view with what facility the human mind may be enslaved, under the name of religion. The main object of the Mormon leaders appears now to be, to drag their deluded followers from pillar to post, leaving behind all those who presume to doubt the infallibility of Jo Smith, or question any thing he may say as being a command of God—thereby obtaining in the end a certain set of slaves who will obey most implicitly every thing which is suggested.³⁹⁶

Such words were not simply doctrinal skepticism or disbelief. It was calculated language, invoking abolitionist terminology to frame a diabolical enemy. Some papers combined elements of vilification—including emboldening statistics, diabolical motives such as

is used in this citation. *Painesville Telegraph*, December 14, 1830, 2; see also “Beware of Imposters,” *Reflector*, February 14, 1831, 103.

³⁹³ “Webster’s Dictionary 1828 - Online Edition,” s.v. *silly*, accessed October 19, 2014, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/>.

³⁹⁴ As transcribed in Morgan, *Dale Morgan on the Mormons: Collected Works, Part 2, 1949-1970*, 15:199.

³⁹⁵ “Mormonism,” *New York Mercury*, October 19, 1831, 54.

³⁹⁶ *Huron Reflector*, July 4, 1831, 2; spelling in original.

“abject slavery” and “the chains of Popery,” and heinous harms to cherished individuals such as the mindless submission of “both soul and body”—to enliven the emotional catharsis to fight the evil.³⁹⁷

The Mormon move to Ohio brought with it a tail of critical commentary—over 68 percent of the 331 articles written in 1831 contained overt criticism and distinguishable vilification. Mormonism’s first year in Kirtland in 1831 established through the pages and tactics of the press the foundation for its violent end in 1837.

Approximately half of the 123 articles in the press in 1832 addressed Mormonism neutrally. Instances of vilification were notably decreased to only two. Both occurrences of overt vilification tactics were found in the New York Temperance paper, the *Genius of Temperance*. Its May 9, 1832, castigation appears to be misdirected at a person and religion thought to be Mormonism but are not clearly identifiable in Mormon history. Whether the editor was mistaken or not, readers were warned about the spread and appearance of the “moral disease” of Mormonism in Philadelphia. The purveyor, one Gabriel Crane, was described as one of their “leaders and preachers, and who is either the wildest of madmen or the most intrepid of imposters ... operating on the foolish.”³⁹⁸ Vilification vocabulary portrays the adversary as corrupt and amoral and defines himself or herself as the moral agent fighting against the evil.

The following month the *Genius* lamented the pitiable condition of human nature

³⁹⁷ See, for example, “Mormon Emigration,” May 26, 1831; “Mormon Emigration,” May 19, 1831; “Mormon Emigration,” *Wayne Sentinel*, May 27, 1831; “Mormon Emigration,” May 26, 1831; “Mormon Emigration,” *Painesville Telegraph*, May 17, 1831, 3.

³⁹⁸ “Mormonism,” *Genius of Temperance*, May 9, 1832, 2.

to “yield their sober senses to be captivated by the absurdities of fanaticism.” Now more accurately describing Mormon missionaries in a companionship, the *Genius* advanced to the next step of vilification by attributing diabolical motives to the enemy wherein Mormonism threatened the basic needs and values of family, friends, home, or country by “endeavoring ... to persuade [hearers] to dispose of their property, forsake their unbelieving friends, and betake them to the city of refuge.” Such as were under the diabolical influence required protecting, and to the editor of the *Genius* it was “certainly justifiable to elevate the standard of Truth” by publishing the nefarious scheme.³⁹⁹ Though not yet broaching physical violence, these preliminary stages of vilification served the critical purposes of shaping an intolerable and amoral enemy that would, with constant and widespread reaffirmation, necessitate an eventual hands-on approach.

The Mormons had become a national topic of conversation by the end of 1832, only their second year in Kirtland, Ohio. Readers in twenty states and territories were influenced by the agendas of their editors. The American newspaper exchange comprised a far-reaching web of interactions between papers that began spreading word of an alarming Mormon villain. The Mormons were most likely unaware of the thoroughness and geographical coverage of the opposing agendas. Nevertheless, the Mormon printer, W. W. Phelps, extracted at least one article from the New York *Genius of Temperance* 1,200 miles away for republication in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, which demonstrates it was one of his exchange papers and that he possessed some awareness of the degrading commentary on his own dogmas.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ “Mormonism,” *Genius of Temperance*, June 13, 1832, 4.

⁴⁰⁰ See *The Evening and the Morning Star*, April 1833, 8.

Chapter 6 continues with the cultural history drawn from the pages of the press as Mormon and non-Mormon editors developed the process of setting their agendas for their readers. The Mormons established their first press in Kirtland, Ohio, and worked feverishly to combat the wide spread of unfavorable topics such as harsh affidavits, a Mormon miracle sinking to its performer's death, and a Mormon army.

CHAPTER 6

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORMON VILIFICATION IN NON-MORMON AGENDA SETTING, 1833-1835

*Their leader, Gen. Smith, is described as a man formerly
of very bad character—never thought remarkable for
mind, but fluent in speech, a notorious bruiser, and
possessing great personal strength and courage.*
The Floridian, June 21, 1834⁴⁰¹

Introduction

“This surely is an age of humbugging. There have been a number of ages in the world—the leaden, iron, silver, gold, and brass, and we know not how many more, but the present excels all for its gullibility. The credulity of man is monstrous.”⁴⁰² So mused the *Daily National Intelligencer* of Washington City (D.C.) on Friday, August 21, 1835. Who could be so credulous as to elicit such a lamentable cry? It was the Mormon propensity to believe the unbelievable. But, the Mormons would fire back with 425 lines of text as soon they had the means to do so.

Chapter 6 continues tracing the thread of printing about and by the Mormons in the environs of Kirtland, Ohio, from 1833 to 1835, inclusively, as the Mormons practiced their agenda setting and non-Mormon editors began shaping the Mormon villain. This

⁴⁰¹ “The Mormons,” *The Floridian*, June 21, 1834, 2.

⁴⁰² “Antiquarian Discovery,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 21, 1835.

chapter presents a sample of the 848 articles found in the American press during these three years and pairs it with the momentum-gaining Mormon press. It identifies the most frequent items of interest as the agenda-setting assaults developed a consistency. The most replicated topics included: the Mormon Missouri problems; concern over Mormon missionary effectiveness; the Mormon army sent to assist their fellows in Missouri; the widely printed discrediting of Smith by one D. P. Hurlbut; an allegedly fatal Mormon miracle of walking on water; a failed Mormon angel; Egyptian mummies; the contaminating effect of Matthias the Prophet; and, the Mormon temple. These articles served all six non-Mormon agendas while the Mormon newspapers similarly enacted all four of their agendas.⁴⁰³

Agenda Setting Theory and Vilification theories continue to elucidate the identification of purposeful manufacturing of a Mormon monster intolerable to American liberties and societies, agenda-setting skills that were sharpened by both sides as social, theological, and financial spaces collided. The evidences are summarized and the chapter concludes with a discussion of how the press unified Mormon believers and calcified antagonists' desire for violence.

The Pungent Press of 1833

The Mormons were less remarkable once established in Kirtland and its environs by 1833, although still credulous enough to warrant consideration by and for the curious.

⁴⁰³ As described in previous chapters, the non-Mormon agendas were exposing: Mormon dishonesty; fanaticism; credulity and gullibility; power; criminality; and vilification. The Mormon agendas were to: dispel, offset, or correct misperceptions; relay church doctrine and structure; unify a scattered membership; and portray a persecuted people.

“The *Mormonites*,” two exchange papers reported in April 1833, “though occupying now less of the public attention than they excited in the earlier stages of their establishment, are still objects of considerable interest.”⁴⁰⁴ Attention in the press for the first half of the year included sundry observations of oddities and fanaticism of the faith. Many editors, such as that of the *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas Territory) in February 1833, reprinted the conviction that Mormonism would not last: “With its authors, the Book of Mormon cannot survive this generation. The next will remember it, only to smile at the credulity of the present.”⁴⁰⁵ Nevertheless, for 1833, the 35 percent of critical articles was nearly the same as the previous year.

Positive Print

Positive press was scarce but precious proof for the Mormon agenda of dispelling, correcting, or offsetting incorrect perceptions. Two newspapers in the spring of 1833 were found to have printed positive commentary on the Mormon personality. “As this sect is still increasing,” readers in Ohio and Pennsylvania were informed, “it is gratifying to know that their habits and customs are peaceable and orderly, and that though bad christians, they are in some places at least good citizens.” The 153-line editorial continued with the “peaceable, unoffending, industrious, frugal, and honest” actions of the “unexceptionable” Mormon townsfolk. “Their little buildings and farms exhibit the most systematic neatness and order, and they appear to be accumulating wealth faster

⁴⁰⁴ P. H. B., “The Mormonites,” *Ohio Eagle*, April 20, 1833, 2; italics in original.

⁴⁰⁵ “The Mormons,” *Arkansas Gazette*, February 20, 1833.

than their neighbors in similar circumstances.”⁴⁰⁶ This uncharacteristic positive press was the exception, comprising only 3 percent of the articles of 1833. As in previous years, editors were, instead, consistently prone to emphasize “the idle, foolish whim-whams of [the Mormon] secret”⁴⁰⁷ as part of their agenda to establish the credulity and gullibility of Mormons.

The Fickleness of American Editors

Smith found what appeared to be an ally in the *American Revivalist*, and *Rochester Observer*, an evangelical paper in upstate New York edited by Noah C. Saxton. Smith saw the troubling world events of cholera, political turmoil, and other calamities reported by Saxton as signs of the times corresponding to what the Lord had revealed to him. Smith was under stringent mandate to declare the Lord’s wrath kindled against the “wicked of this generation”⁴⁰⁸ and to proclaim the requisite call to repentance, a facet of the Mormon agenda of dispensing doctrine. He was encouraged by Saxton’s appeal to brethren in the ministry to contribute liberally to the “free discussion and critical investigation of the doctrines and duties of Christianity” in the columns of his

⁴⁰⁶ P. H. B., “The Mormonites,” 2; capitalization in original. The article was copied from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, *Saturday Courier*.

⁴⁰⁷ *Adams Sentinel*, August 5, 1833, 3. See also “Mormonites,” *Free Enquirer*, October 5, 1833. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *whim-wham* as “a fantastic notion, odd fancy.” “Whim-Wham,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁴⁰⁸ Joseph Smith Jr., “To N. E. Sexton Rochester NY,” January 4, 1833, “Letterbook 1, p. 17-18,” The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letterbook-1/30>.

paper.⁴⁰⁹ The invitation of the *Revivalist* offered an established reputation and readership as opposed to the fledgling and remote Mormon newspaper, *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Independence, Missouri), and was a more likely entrance to the spreading influence of the exchange. The opportunity and avenue appeared to be divinely orchestrated.

“Therefore I declare unto you the warning which the Lord has commanded me to declare unto this generation,” Smith wrote to Saxton with the sure expectation that he publish it. “I am prepared to say by the authority of Jesus Christ, that not many years shall pass away before the United States shall present such a scene of bloodshed as has not a parallel in the hystory of our nation.”⁴¹⁰ Saxton received Smith’s epistle and printed an article titled “Mormonism” the next month in February 1833 but included only the two concluding paragraphs of Smith’s letter.⁴¹¹

Smith soon learned that freedom of the press was not a guarantee of access to the press, and the partisanship of American papers to whatever their espoused cause was a well-known aspect of American print culture. Smith’s already healthy disdain for and distrust of the press evoked another letter to Saxton wherein he expressed his disappointment at seeing only a portion of his letter set to press. Disappointment was not

⁴⁰⁹ Noah C. Saxton, “American Revivalist, and Rochester Observer,” *American Revivalist, and Rochester Observer*, September 29, 1832, 1.

⁴¹⁰ Smith Jr., “To N. E. Sexton Rochester NY;” spelling and emphasis in original. The original letter is not extant, but it was copied into Smith’s history by a designated scribe.

⁴¹¹ See “Mormonism,” *American Revivalist, and Rochester Observer*, February 2, 1833, 2; see also “Letter to Noah C. Sexton, 12 February 1833 — Historical Introduction,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/?target=x142>.

surprise; nevertheless, Smith's position as seer and prophet entitled him to pronounce penalties if Saxton did not reconsider and republish the letter in its entirety: "I now say unto you that if you wish to clear your garments from the blood of your readers I exhort you to publish that letter entire, but if not, the sin be upon your head."⁴¹² Saxton was unaffected by the threat. Only three years into the Church's formal existence, Smith was preoccupied with the power and pugilism of the press.

The Razing of Independence Mormons

The Missouri Mormons drew more attention in 1833 than those in Kirtland, and papers as far as Washington City took interest in the starting of a small stream of dissatisfied Mormons leaving the Missouri community. The *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington City) and *Pittsfield (MA) Sun* reprinted in June 1833 the denunciation of one such disavowed member that "the tongues spoken of by me [since I joined the Mormons] are of my own invention, and that ... *the whole is a farce*."⁴¹³ Editors, including those in Ohio, were keen to point to the ironies printed in the Missouri Mormon paper that they were "flourishing abundantly 'in these last days'"⁴¹⁴ when apparently all was not well in Zion. Such were obvious evidences for their agenda of exposing Mormon dishonesty. The building interchange between non-Mormon and Mormon agendas is

⁴¹² Joseph Smith, "Letter to Noah C. Saxton, 12 February 1833," February 12, 1833, 27, 28, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/?target=x142>; spelling and punctuation modernized.

⁴¹³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 22, 1833; italics in original; "The Mormons," *Pittsfield Sun*, June 27, 1833, 3.

⁴¹⁴ "The Mormons," *Western Courier*, July 4, 1833, 2.

clear in the papers of 1833.

The April 1833 *The Evening and the Morning Star* overtly stated its agendas, particularly to dispel, correct, or offset perceptions of the Mormons perpetrated by the opposing agenda of antagonistic editors to sketch a dishonest, fanatical, and gullible people. W. W. Phelps, the first Mormon printer, correlated the hostile barbs of the American press with their effects on the growing body of Mormons: “As many false reports are in circulation abroad, respecting the disciples of our Savior in the land of Zion, we feel it our duty to correct such as may be injurious to them.”⁴¹⁵ Addressed to the “Brethren Abroad,” the *Star* donned a primary agenda of Mormon papers for the next centuries—reassuring and strengthening the unity of a scattered and press-persecuted people. As the Mormons implemented the new agendas, the ideology of freedom of the press and religion was not lost to them. Amid the paper’s pensiveness, Phelps solicited the First Amendment. “It is, therefore, regrettable,” he wondered aloud,

that men should be persecuted for opinion’s sake, or the sake of religion, when the constitution of our country allows all to worship according to the dictates of their own consciences. The freedom of speech, the liberty of conscience, and the liberty of the press, are among the first principles of a republican government, and we hope they will be held sacred by every friend of his country.⁴¹⁶

The patriotic appeal to the wider American citizenry fell flat among its more immediate Missouri neighbors who were already brewing their own defense of local liberty by the hands of “King Mob,”⁴¹⁷ which led to the destruction of the Mormon printing office.

⁴¹⁵ “To The Brethren Abroad,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, April 1833, 4; spelling in original.

⁴¹⁶ William W. Phelps, “Prospects of the Church,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, March 1833, 4; capitalization in original.

⁴¹⁷ Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, viii.

Not many months later in August 1833 one of the nation's central Whig papers reported in Washington City: "Some very extraordinary proceedings have recently taken place in Jackson county ... against the sect of fanatics called Mormons."⁴¹⁸ The article was reprinted from the exchange that quickly swelled with more than thirty papers that addressed the hostilities in more than a third of the states in the last five months of 1833. "The people residing in and near [the Mormon] village on the Missouri," explained another Washington paper,

became exasperated at some specimens of their *predatory* habits, and proceeded in a body to their village, demolished the printing establishment, ... and inflicted considerable injury upon the person and property of the whole brotherhood. The High Priest was tarred and feathered and paraded through the village in a cart.⁴¹⁹

A whirlwind of contrivances had been gaining momentum among the disparate inhabitants of Jackson County that centered on and touched down with destructive force on the Mormon press. The exchange was quickly privy to the violation of free press liberties and the nation's papers carried the news that the Mormons were no longer to print their newspaper in Missouri.⁴²⁰ Forty-three articles in the American press criticized, defended, doubted, and rebutted the Mormon experience in Jackson County from August

⁴¹⁸ "Mormonites in Missouri," *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 21, 1833, 2.

⁴¹⁹ "Mormonism," *United States Telegraph*, August 17, 1833; italics and capitalization in original.

⁴²⁰ The old settlers of Missouri were violently displeased with Mormon claims and beliefs such as: an absolute eternal land inheritance; the elevation of relocated Indians to their rightful place amongst the Abrahamic tribes; general Northern abolitionist leanings; and self-righteous saints promoting allegiance to a distant prophet and a dangerously not-so-distant God. The chasm became irreconcilable when the Mormon Phelps printed an article entitled, "Free People of Color," which was construed to fit the dissatisfied citizens' purposes for driving out the Mormons. For their "Constitution" that outlined their griefs and justified their actions, see "Mormonites in Missouri," 2; spelling in original.

to December 1833.⁴²¹

Concern for the Converting Power of Mormon Missionaries

Mormonism continued to be a point of interest and trepidation in the national press aside from the Missouri mobbing. More than six hundred miles from Kirtland and nearly 1,500 miles from the Mormon Zion in Missouri, the Free Will Baptist Church in Andover, Maine, suffered membership loss “by a couple of preachers who dispense[d] the word from the Book of Mormon.” The August 1833 *Dover (NH) Gazette and Strafford Advertiser* detailed the arrival of the missionaries as “working miracles and doing many marvellous things” along the way while baptizing nine. The eleven-line announcement was reduced as it moved through the exchange in New Hampshire and Massachusetts to a simple four-line statement on the baptisms.⁴²² The reprinting of such a small Mormon influence is evidence of editors’ agenda of alerting readers to the increasing Mormon power. Mormon growth was eyed suspiciously insomuch that even the baptism of nine converts was statistically significant to occupy a few lines amid thousands.

The *Portsmouth (NH) Journal* of September 7, 1833, printed a second article in the same issue sarcastically detailing the plight of a Mormon preacher who, “by way of establishing his infallibility, asserted that his flesh could not be hurt, upon which a

⁴²¹ See also Chatelain, “A Cultural History of the Mormon Expulsion from Jackson County, Missouri,” 1–90; unpublished manuscript.

⁴²² “Andover, (Me.) Aug. 9, 1833,” *Dover Gazette and Strafford Advertiser*, August 27, 1833; spelling in original; see also *Liberator*, September 7, 1833; *Portsmouth Journal*, September 7, 1833, 3.

bystander gave him a blow that brought him sprawling to the ground.” The negation of the claim by the brawler “was too strong, and he [the missionary] made off,” the article chuckled.⁴²³ Editors seemed to find enjoyment in their agenda of providing readers with any amount of Mormon hypocrisy (dishonesty) as a means of reducing their budding estimation of the Mormons.

On the other hand, The New Haven, Connecticut, *Religious Intelligencer*, also published in September 1833, was not amused with the holding power of a Mormon missionary. The concern occupied nearly a full printed page. He was a “young man, tall, well educated, of handsome address, and, to do the man justice, *eloquent*. His oratory was precisely of that fervid, impassioned kind; of all others the best calculated to produce deep and powerful impression on the minds of his hearers.” A dense mass of observers stood transfixed for an unbelievable “*three hours* ... [as his] body was bent forward, his eyes seemed about to flash fire, and the deep and shrill intonations of his voice vibrated on every heart.” Their eyes were riveted on the speaker with intensity and their souls elevated to the highest pitch of excitement. This ability, warned the observer, was not to be ignored by inattentive Americans. The writer admonished that it was time “that Mormonism was met; not as hitherto, with sneers and misrepresentation, but *fairly, candidly*, and in the spirit of *charity* and *truth*.”⁴²⁴

The article, as of this study, was not found reprinted in the exchange, although some degree of agenda setting seems apparent for a New Hampshire newspaper to print a

⁴²³ *Portsmouth Journal*, September 7, 1833, 4.

⁴²⁴ Bluffdale, “Mormonism,” *Religious Intelligencer*, September 14, 1833, 247; spelling and emphases in original.

letter from a reader in Illinois. The Mormons, having lost their only press during this time, would have turned the example of Mormon missionary abilities to their own agenda of correcting the Mormon image had they had the capability.

Doctor Philastus Hurlbut

Mormonism drew converts of all manner of stripes who associated themselves with the growing religion for any number of reasons, including, as Smith found, individual aspiration. Then, as motives or actions proved incongruent with Mormon boundaries, Smith's community required a means of expulsion. More dangerous, however, was an excommunicated person's need or desire for justification for joining or leaving, which means was readily available on the pages of a local and national press. Such was the excommunication of Doctor Philastus Hurlbut in 1833 and the resulting printed matter.⁴²⁵

Hurlbut was excommunicated twice—once for illicit relations and the second for boasting he had duped Smith and the leading priesthood with a disingenuous confession.⁴²⁶ His fall from grace included the charge that the Book of Mormon was not a translation of ancient scripture but a pilfered enlargement of a “romantic history” of the

⁴²⁵ “Doctor” was his given name. It was not uncommon in nineteenth-century America for parents to use honorific titles such as *Major* or *Noble* as first names. The implication for journalism historians is that contemporary editors generally did not research whether it was a name or title, and what was printed as a title, such as “Dr. Philastus Hurlbut,” perpetuated an inaccurate air of importance or achievement.

⁴²⁶ See Dale W. Adams, “Doctor Philastus Hurlbut: Originator of Derogatory Statements About Joseph Smith, Jr.,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 20 (2000): 77–94.

American Indians written by one Solomon Spaulding and called “Manuscript Found.”⁴²⁷

The editor of the Palmyra, New York, *Wayne Sentinel*, the somewhat forgotten Palmyra press that had printed the Book of Mormon, triumphantly pronounced in December 1833 its plausible unraveling. He told of one “Doct. P. Herlbert, of Kirtland, Ohio,” who had been touring the region in pursuit of facts and information concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon. The editor teased his readers with weekly installments of the findings⁴²⁸ and promised “an authentic history of the whole affair will shortly be given.” Until then, he leaked what would become an unrelenting noxious burr for Mormonism: “The original manuscript of the Book was written some thirty years since, by a respectable clergyman, now deceased ... designed to be published as a romance.”⁴²⁹ The suspicious authorship of the Book of Mormon was ideal evidence to support the agenda of Smith’s, and therefore Mormon dishonesty.

Smith was not unfamiliar with accusations that the Book of Mormon was a ruse and he had grown accustomed to printed criticism of his character.⁴³⁰ Yet, Hurlbut’s claims presented Smith a new quandary: how to prove untrue that which the press was using to prove Mormonism untrue?⁴³¹ The press, which gave birth to Mormonism

⁴²⁷ E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, OH: E. D. Howe, 1834), chap. XIX.

⁴²⁸ See *Wayne Sentinel*, December 6, 1833, 2.

⁴²⁹ “The Mormon Mystery Developed,” *Wayne Sentinel*, December 20, 1833, 3; spelling, italics, and capitalization in original.

⁴³⁰ See Chatelain, “The Early Reception of the Book of Mormon in Nineteenth-Century America.”

⁴³¹ Scholars in and out of the Church have expended notable effort debunking the so-called Spaulding theory. Spaulding’s manuscript was found in 1884 and has been

through the pages of the Book of Mormon, was now being used to call into question the origin of Mormon existence. Hurlbut's Spaulding claim was found in twenty papers consecutively from 1833 to 1841 in fifteen cities in eight states. Once Hurlbut's evidences were set to print and inflated through the exchange, Smith had little hope of deflating them. Hurlbut had provided editors a lasting, effective agenda to weaken Mormonism's foundation.

The Mormon Press Reestablished

A meeting of Smith and other leading brethren in Kirtland on September 11, 1833, took "into consideration the expediency of establishing a printing press [in Kirtland]." The vote to purchase a new press to resume what was interrupted in the destruction of the Missouri press was unanimous.⁴³² Accordingly, the church's next editor, Oliver Cowdery, was sent to New York in October 1833 with eight hundred dollars to purchase the press.⁴³³ Two months later on December 18, 1833, Smith and

published with accompanying critical evaluations. See, for example, Solomon Spaulding, *The "Manuscript Found": Manuscript Story*, by Rev. Solomon Spaulding (Salt Lake City, UT: The Deseret News Company, 1886); Solomon Spaulding, *Manuscript Found: The Complete Original "Spaulding Manuscript,"* ed. Kent P. Jackson, vol. 11, Religious Studies Center Specialized Monograph Series (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1996). Former Mormon and outspoken critic of the LDS Church Fawn Brodie included in her exposé of Joseph Smith a careful examination of the fallacies of the Spaulding theory. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 442–56.

⁴³² "Minutes, 11 September 1833, Page 24," The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 14, 2018, /paper-summary/minutes-11-september-1833/1. Smith received the divine direction to establish the press a month earlier, in August 1833, "for the work of the printing of the translation of my scriptures [*sic*] and all things whatsoever I shall command you." "Revelation, 2 August 1833–B [D&C 94], Page 65," The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 14, 2018, /paper-summary/revelation-2-august-1833-b-dc-94/2.

⁴³³ See "Oliver Cowdery to Purchase Press – Details," The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 14, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/event/oliver-cowdery-to->

others gathered in the new Kirtland printing office to dedicate the press and view a proof sheet of the resurrected *The Evening and the Morning Star*.⁴³⁴ Cowdery's opening lines reviewed the circumstances of the interruption of issues of the monthly paper, which conflicts, he wrote, "have been contradicted or exaggerated, equally as often as they have been circulated, until the public mind has despaired of anything authentic on the subject."⁴³⁵ Cowdery assured his commitment to the agenda of correcting the accounting of the Missouri persecution and Mormon sufferings.

A heavenly plea was made a few weeks later in January 1834 on the occasion of a fervent prayer by Smith and his brethren that

the Lord would protect our printing press from the hands of evil men, and give us means to send forth his word, even his gospel that the ears of all may hear it, and also that we may print his scriptures and also that he would give those who were appointed to conduct the press, wisdom sufficient that the cause may not be hindered, but that men's eyes may thereby be opened to see the truth.⁴³⁶

The Mormons had their press again and, now under divine protection, the war of words and agendas to shape the image of Mormonism had resumed.

purchase-press.

⁴³⁴ See "The Evening and the Morning Star Published in Kirtland – Details," The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 14, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/event/the-evening-and-the-morning-star-published-in-kirtland>.

⁴³⁵ Cowdery, "To the Patrons of the Evening and the Morning Star," 225; spelling modernized for readability.

⁴³⁶ "Prayer, 11 January 1834," The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 30, 2016, [/paper-summary/prayer-11-january-1834/1](#); spelling in original; See also "Prayer, 11 January 1834 — Historical Introduction," The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 30, 2016, [/paper-summary/prayer-11-january-1834/1](#).

1834: Mormonism More Complicated

Interest in Mormonism grew in 1834 in result of the Mormon plight in Missouri. Newspaper articles increased approximately 27 percent from 283 in 1833 to 359 in 1834. The percentage of critical editorials remained consistent at about 33 percent with a marked increase in neutral articles to 65 percent. Once the Mormons reestablished their printing press, their responses to articles printed about them in 1834 likewise increased, some of which resurrected and rebutted offensive topics promoted by editors years earlier as part of their agenda to correct misconceptions about them. The significance of the freedoms of speech, religion, and of the press implicated in the mob actions in Jackson County caused editors to duplicate articles more in the exchange in 1834 than at any previous time. The 1834 commentary, on the other hand, was more objective and not as prone to personal epithets. Editors shifted their approach from the former individual slurs about Mormon fanaticism to a wider perspective of how the Mormon maltreatment played into the ongoing national conversations on Constitutional freedoms.

The violence against the Mormons in Missouri and the Kirtland Mormon answer (an army named the “Camp of Israel” or “Zion’s Camp,” which is described later in the chapter) were the overwhelming point of discussions in print throughout 1834. Nevertheless, editors selected a few additional topics for their agendas of Mormon fanaticism and dishonesty that stung Mormon sensitivity sufficiently for them to reply on the pages of their paper under their agenda of portraying a victimized people. The power of the press, particularly a persecuted one, was clear to the Mormons. The year 1834 posed a poignant lesson for the Mormons as they read wildly varied versions of their experiences while at the same time bending their own renderings for their purposes of

eliciting maximum sympathetic benefit from tenderhearted Americans and those intent on examining social injustice. The central component of Agenda Setting Theory is that the public responds not to the actual environment, but to the pseudo-environment constructed by the news media, particularly when access to the “real” environment is limited.⁴³⁷ Editorial renderings of Mormon experiences engendered a pseudo-environment of 1834 that proved both ally and nemesis to the Mormons.

Hurlbut Has his Revenge—and so Does Smith

From January to April 1834, Doctor Philastus Hurlbut and his Spaulding theory were found in seventeen newspaper columns spanning 1,400 miles in seven states from Massachusetts and Vermont to Pennsylvania and Indiana, and three years later in Nova Scotia. Smith hardly conceived the breadth of Hurlbut’s influence, which was selected repeatedly by editors to support their agenda of disproving Smith’s foundational claims (dishonesty). Smith’s year opened with Hurlbut’s announcement on the pages of eight presses that “[rejoiced] that the humbug of the Mormon bible [was] about to be fully exposed.” It was accomplished through Hurlbut’s ascertaining the “true” origin of the Book of Mormon and the “character of the leaders in the bungling imposition.”⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ See Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 15, 43; see also McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*, 3.

⁴³⁸ “The Mormon Mystery,” *Ohio Repository*, February 28, 1834, 2; capitalization in original; “The Mormon Mystery Developed,” *Ohio Observer*, January 18, 1834; see also *Essex Gazette*, January 11, 1834, 3; *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette*, April 29, 1834; “Mormonism,” *Guernsey Times*, January 18, 1834, 3; “Mormonism,” *Vermont Chronicle*, January 31, 1834; *Richmond Palladium*, February 1, 1834, 3; “The Mormon Mystery Developed,” *Journal and Telegraph*, February 15, 1834, 48; “Mormonism,” *Colonial Churchman*, March 23, 1837, 3.

Hurlbut had been commissioned by a Kirtland committee that was determined to publish a work that would prove the Mormon text “to be a work of *fiction* and *imagination* ... and completely divest Joseph Smith of all claims to the character of an honest man, and place him at an immeasurable distance from the high station which he pretends to occupy.” Editors were less interested in the directive than the results, which circulated in three papers in Ohio and Connecticut.⁴³⁹

Antagonism between Smith and Hurlbut climaxed in December 1833 when Smith filed a complaint that Hurlbut had threatened to kill him.⁴⁴⁰ Tensions between Mormons and their neighbors in Kirtland were growing, and Smith’s fears of being harmed were genuine.⁴⁴¹ On January 11, 1834, he and five close associates gathered for a prayer of protection. Third in the petition was that Smith would prevail in an upcoming hearing against his enemy Hurlbut.⁴⁴² The Madison, Indiana, *Republican and Banner* 338 miles south of Kirtland picked up the story from the exchange where “Dr. P. Hurlburt” had been bound “to keep the peace towards the ... renowned prophet.” Many witnesses

⁴³⁹ “To the Public,” *Painesville Telegraph*, January 31, 1834, 3; capitalization and emphases in original; “To the Public,” *Free Elector*, April 22, 1834, 1.

⁴⁴⁰ See “Trial of Doctor Philastus Hurlbut – Details,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/event/trial-of-doctor-philastus-hurlbut>.

⁴⁴¹ Smith wrote a letter to church leaders in Missouri stating, “We are no safer here in Kirtland than you are in Zion; the cloud is gathering around us with great fury and ... all hell and the combined powers of Earth are marshaling their forces to overthrow us.” “Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 18 August 1833,” The Joseph Smith Papers, 2, accessed January 23, 2018, [/paper-summary/letter-to-church-leaders-in-jackson-county-missouri-18-august-1833/2](#); spelling and punctuation modernized.

⁴⁴² See “Prayer, 11 January 1834.”

testified to the threat, but the paper found interest in the fact that one female witness who knew of Hurlbut's threat did not communicate the hazard to Smith because "she did not believe Hurlburt, or any other human being, had the power to hurt the prophet." Ever aware of opportunities to discredit Smith for their readers, the editor was quick to point out that the very mortal Smith appeared "to have placed little reliance upon his divine invulnerability; for he testified that he became afraid of bodily injury from the defendant."⁴⁴³ Was he guarded from on high or not? Editors enclosed the matter in enough sarcasm to lead subscribers to scoff at Smith's pretensions, a sure mark of the agenda to expose Mormon dishonesty.

The Kirtland *Evening and Morning Star's* new editor, Oliver Cowdery, assumed a far different purpose with the paper than Phelps's doctrinally heavy columns with a quickly obvious intent to react against columns printed against the Mormons in the American press. Cowdery devoted a combined eleven pages from January to August 1834 responding to outside articles, during which time Hurlbut's printed effects had become intolerable. By April 1834, Cowdery was incensed at the replications of the matter. "We have not, till now, thought this man worthy a notice in our paper." Nor would he have been had it not become necessary to the Mormon agenda to correct false information, which this time entailed discrediting Hurlbut by "undeceive[ing] those at a distance who are unacquainted with him and may be deceived in consequence of the ... title, of Doctor." He "is not a physician," Cowdery castigated. The 157-line article addressed other fallacies perpetuated in the press and counseled readers to consider the

⁴⁴³ "Mormonism in Court," *Republican and Banner*, April 29, 1834, 3; spelling in original.

character of the man calling Smith's into question.⁴⁴⁴

Hurlbut's most persistent damage came with the helping hands of the outspoken Mormon antagonist and editor of the eleven-mile-distant *Painesville (OH) Telegraph*, Eber D. Howe. "The following work," Howe wrote with feigned melancholy, "was undertaken with reluctance at the earnest solicitation of a great number of friends, who had, with the author, long looked upon the subject which it treats, with mingled feelings of abhorrence and pity." Such was the prologue of *Mormonism Unveiled*, the 290-page collection and expansion of Hurlbut's accumulated affidavits about Smith, his family, and the alternate Spaulding origin of the Book of Mormon. Howe assured the book would present "in somewhat a new light, to the enquiring mind, the depths of folly, degradation and superstition" of the Mormon delusion that had "already seized and taken possession of great numbers of people in our enlightened country." Howe intended the clarified perception of Smith to warn those, who through a lack of "correct knowledge of the imposition, to be enclosed within its fetters."⁴⁴⁵ Howe's agenda to prove Mormon dishonesty was clear: discredit Smith and the key Mormon text, the Book of Mormon, so that if Ohioans or any American were approached by either, they would know to disbelieve.

Howe announced the sale of the book on the third page of his November 28, 1834, issue as "containing a history of the Mormonite imposition, from its rise to the

⁴⁴⁴ Oliver Cowdery, *Evening and Morning Star*, April 1834, 298–99; spelling in original.

⁴⁴⁵ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time*, iii, ix; spelling in original.

present time, with many other peculiarities of the sect.”⁴⁴⁶ Considering the initial fascination in the newspapers in Hurlbut’s fact-finding expedition, the exchange exhibited very little interest in the resulting printed matter. Reading minds already prejudiced by anti-Mormon rhetoric were sufficiently satisfied by anti-Smith snippets.

A year later the Kirtland *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* set in type a letter from Smith to scattered missionaries and leaders that contained vitriolic intolerance for Hurlbut and Howe. “The right honorable Doct. P. Hurlbut ... is not so much a doctor of physic, as of falsehood.” As for the “reverend Mr. Howe, the illegitimate author of ‘Mormonism Unveiled,’ ... we hope that this adversary of truth will continue to stir up the sink of iniquity, that people may the more readily discern between the righteous and wicked.”⁴⁴⁷ Smith flipped Hurlbut’s and Howe’s tactics hoping the more they slandered him the more the public would see their surreptitious purposes and seek for the truth. However, Smith never did free himself from Hurlbut’s allegations. Mormon editors were still rebutting the damage in their two subsequent newspapers for the next six years.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ E. D. Howe, “Mormonism Unvailed,” *Painesville Telegraph*, November 28, 1834, 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Joseph Smith Jr., “To the Elders of the Church of the Latter Day Saints,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, December 1835, 227–28; spelling in original. Howe’s book contained a particularly painful barb for Smith and his wife, a four-page denouncement by his father-in-law, Isaac Hale. The relationship was strained from the beginning when Smith married Hale’s daughter without his permission. It was aggravated by Smith’s spiritual claims. Word may have reached Smith that Hale had written to the *Susquehanna (PA) Register* the previous spring in May 1834 with words calculated to distance the Hale family from the Smith farce and accused Smith of living on the spoils of those who swallowed his deception. See “Mormonism,” *Susquehanna Register and Northern Pennsylvanian*, May 1, 1834, 1; see also Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed: Or A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time*, 265–66.

⁴⁴⁸ See *Elders’ Journal*, August 1838, 60; see also “An Address to the Citizens of

Smith was exasperated at the impotence of his agenda to correct misinformation of those who assumed Hurlbut's agenda of uncovering Mormonism fraudulence. He was constantly reminded of what Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville noted: "When once the Americans have taken up an idea, whether it be well or ill-founded, nothing is more difficult than to eradicate it from their minds."⁴⁴⁹

Walking on Water

Sociologist Alfred McClung Lee noted that much of publishing in journalism history is characterized by *thobbery*, a word coined in 1931 by Charles Henshaw Ward to be "the confident reasoning of a person who is not curious about verifying his result."⁴⁵⁰ The nascent freedoms of speech and of the press in the nineteenth century were without the governance of precedent, and the only oversight for accuracy or accountability for editors was violence on their person or their press. Short of this, thobbery was blessed with impunity. Furthermore, Americans consumed print so voraciously that the occasional headline, "Important if True," was of no concern. A story's authentication was the multiplication of its replication. Such was the next Mormon rasp, which opened with,

Salem (Mass.) And Vicinity," *Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1841, 576. Hurlbut's claims plagued Smith throughout his life and have occupied the writing of Mormon scholars to the current day. See, for example, "The Hurlbut Affidavits - FairMormon," FairMormon, accessed December 30, 2016, http://en.fairmormon.org/Criticism_of_Mormonism/Books/Mormonism_Unvailed/The_Hurlbut_affidavits#cite_note-1.

⁴⁴⁹ de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1875, 1:187.

⁴⁵⁰ Alfred McClung Lee, "The Editorial Staff," in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 186; See also Charles H. Ward, *Builders of Delusion: A Tour Among Our Best Minds* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1931), 131.

“We shall expect to see [the following incident] authenticated by the Western papers, if it be true.” At least nine editors in 1834 in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Iowa who reproduced the story cared less for verification than they did for good reading, and anything Mormon was good reading, particularly failed Mormon miracles such as the following.

“Tragical Event!” began the seventy-seven-line narrative of a Mormon preacher who promised the curious a miracle by walking on water. However, a few skeptics secretly set themselves to make mischief. Having discovered the means of the miracle to be planks placed unnoticeably under the surface of the mire, they sawed the concealed bridge into pieces at the most dangerous part of the pond. Just as the wondering observers began to believe, the miracle worker stepped on the detached plank and “instantly plunged, floundering and sinking in the watry mire.” The shrieks, screams, and shouts of the spectators and “even those who had spoiled the miracle, were filled with horror, when they actually saw the unfortunate imposter finally disappear” to his death in the depths.⁴⁵¹ The article ends without commentary, what might seem a counterintuitive way for editors to add legitimacy to the account. Keeping the story as-is without telltale interpretation was a way to set the agenda by leaving their readers to shake their heads in disbelief at the obviously dishonest Mormon character.

The nine replicating newspapers traversed five states spanning 1,300 miles from

⁴⁵¹ “Tragical Event,” *Rising Sun*, April 5, 1834, 2; spelling in original. For an exposition of the American folklore of the walking on water miracle, see Stanley J. Thayne, “Walking on Water: Nineteenth-Century Prophets and a Legend of Religious Imposture,” in *Between Pulpit and Pew: The Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore*, ed. W. Paul Reeve and Michael Van Wagenen (Utah State University Press, 2011), chap. 8.

Boston, Massachusetts, to Rising Sun, Iowa, in four short months.⁴⁵² Where many exchange articles suffered the chopping necessities of available column space or modification by editors bent on their own version of the text,⁴⁵³ this article is noteworthy because of its repetition in its lengthy entirety. Moreover, when most printed retorts sometimes took months to appear, the Mormons countered quickly, printing their reactionary agenda to the “fool-figured article” before it had finished its circulation.

The Mormon rejoinder was the same length as the article, which they also reprinted in its entirety. “A similar story was *hatched* up ... two or three years since,” the exasperated Mormon editor wrote, but “we had supposed that it had either gone back to its native region to dwell with its author the father of lies, or ... sunk into disgrace to rise no more.” The fabrication’s resuscitation was further evidence to the affronted faith, that “there are yet men to be found who are willing to exert every possible power to circulate, not only circulate, but *frame* falsehoods of every description and enormity, that has not a parallel in the annals of the world since the creation.” The melodramatic flair illuminates the preoccupation Mormons were developing to what was printed about them. The irrationality of such an account, explained the *Mormon Star*, should be to the “minds of

⁴⁵² See, for example, “Tragical Event!,” *Liberator*, February 22, 1834; “Tragical Event,” *Northampton Courier*, March 26, 1834, 2; “Mormonites,” *Pittsfield Sun*, April 3, 1834, 3; “Tragical Event,” *Adams Sentinel*, April 7, 1834, 4; “Tragical Event,” *New-York Spectator*, April 21, 1834. A year later the topic resurfaced again in an off-hand jab that “the Mormonites work miracles, and in the nineteenth century, heal the sick, walk on the water, [or rather drown *in* it]...” G. R., “Mormonism and Christianity,” *Temple of Reason*, July 25, 1835, 91; emphasis in original.

⁴⁵³ For example, one concerned contributor wrote, “I don’t want to leave the publication of the [Post Office Department] reports to the hireling newspapers, which just pick out enough to suit their purposes.” *New Hampshire Statesman and State Journal*, February 28, 1835.

discerning individuals ... with a thimble full of brains, ... not only *foolish*, but *false*.”⁴⁵⁴

It is improbable that any of the nine offending editors read the rebuttal, nor with their thobbery even cared. Mormon hypersensitivity to print ossified as this and similar stories stuck as Mormon editors even a decade later strived to strike such fables down.⁴⁵⁵ To Mormon chagrin, relentless rumor was thobbery’s offspring.

The Mormon Camp of Israel

The Missouri machinations were the overwhelming Mormon topic of choice through the nation in 1834, being deliberated in more than eighty editorials. Though there is not sufficient space in this study to address them, it is worthwhile to bring to light one facet of the epic distinctive to the Kirtland Mormons in 1834—the Mormon army known as the Camp of Israel or Zion’s Camp sent from Kirtland to restore the Missouri Mormons to their lands.⁴⁵⁶

On May 9, 1834, the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* announced, “The Mormon war in Missouri is about to be renewed. Gen. Joe Smith took up his line of march ... with a large party of his fanatical followers, for the seat of war.” Twenty-seven more newspapers—and likely dozens more not yet found—in as many cities and in ten states picked up the conversation in the next sixty-four days. The Mormon press, the paper

⁴⁵⁴ *Evening and Morning Star*, April 1834, 12–13; emphases in original.

⁴⁵⁵ See “Who Shall Be Our President?,” *Times and Seasons*, February 15, 1844, 441.

⁴⁵⁶ For a brief overview of the Mormon force, see “Camp of Israel – Glossary Topic,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/camp-of-israel?highlight=Zion%E2%80%99s%20Camp>.

continued, was heavily engaged in bolstering recruitment efforts. Smith's "preachers were sent forth to all parts of the country among their proselytes, with a printed copy of the revelation in their pockets, reiterating and magnifying all the tales of woe which had befallen '*the church*,' in the 'promised land.'"⁴⁵⁷

The revelation, the Providence, Rhode Island, *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal* added, "[required] the aid of the faithful to 'expel the infidels from the Holy Land.'"⁴⁵⁸ The reported number of those who volunteered to "buckle on the armor of their faith"⁴⁵⁹ increased each successive week in the exchange from an initial two hundred to an alarming seven hundred by July 1834. Furthermore, they were "for several months past ... collecting munitions of war for the crusade" including "dirks, knives, swords, pistols, guns, powder horns, &c. &c."⁴⁶⁰ Most striking was the prophet's own "sword more than four feet long" and his professing to fall as a martyr in the looming contest.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁷ "The Mormon War," *Painesville Telegraph*, May 9, 1834, 3; italics in original.

⁴⁵⁸ "The Mormon War in Missouri," *Manufacturers' and Farmers' Journal*, May 22, 1834, 4. Some of the exchange papers phrased the printed recruiting efforts thusly: "Gen. Joe Smith, has sent in the form of a circular, his pretended revelations from on high...." See, for example, *Republican and Banner*, June 26, 1834, 3.

⁴⁵⁹ "The Mormonites in Motion," *Catholic Telegraph*, June 13, 1834, 227; see also "The Mormonites in Motion," *Guernsey Times*, May 31, 1834, 1; *Adams Sentinel*, May 26, 1834.

⁴⁶⁰ "The Mormon War," May 9, 1834.

⁴⁶¹ "The Mormon War in Missouri," *Daily Evening Transcript*, May 19, 1834, 2; see also "The Mormon War in Missouri," *New-Bedford Mercury*, May 23, 1834, 1. It is unclear if the reference to the sword is related to the Palmyra, New York, *Reflector* 1830 report of Smith's discovering a "rusty sword" with the gold plates. If so, the press had a four-year memory. See Abner Cole, "The Book of Pukei," *Reflector*, June 12, 1830, 1; Abner Cole, "The Book of Pukei Chapter 2," *Reflector*, July 7, 1830.

Newspapers throughout Ohio took up the task of interpreting the surprising Mormon plans for aggression. The Mormons, “700 at least, well armed,” detailed the *Ohio Atlas*, “are determined to resist sword in hand [with] a fixed determination, to protect themselves in their supposed rights, and we fear that much blood will yet be shed. The excitement is great among the people of Jackson County.”⁴⁶² No fewer than fifty additional articles followed the drama of Zion’s Camp from July to December 1834, spreading the tale through thirteen of the twenty-four states in the Union with penny-press panache.⁴⁶³

The year 1834 closed with more articles printed on Mormonism in one year than in any previous year. At 359 articles, someone, somewhere in the nation was reading of the Mormons on average every day in 1834. It is a remarkable demonstration of editors’ ability to reach American minds by setting the agenda of what they should think about the church and its members, particularly considering a third of which content was overtly critical.

The Mormons regrouped their printing efforts in September 1834 by closing the *Star*⁴⁶⁴ and inaugurating their next paper, the monthly *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, which ran until September 1837. Its objective, avowed in its first issue of

⁴⁶² “The Mormons,” *Ohio Atlas and Elyria Advertiser*, July 10, 1834, 2.

⁴⁶³ The stories were placed before readers alongside news of President Andrew Jackson’s attitude and actions toward the Second Bank of the United States, anti-abolitionist riots in New York City, and the Ursuline Convent riots. See, for example, *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 2, 1834; *New York Spectator*, October 23, 1834, 1; *Republican and Banner*, November 6, 1834, 1; *Painesville Telegraph*, October 31, 1834, 2.

⁴⁶⁴ See Oliver Cowdery, “Address to the Patrons of the Evening and Morning Star,” *Evening and Morning Star*, September 1834, 369–71.

October 1834, was to “endeavor to persuade men to turn from error and vain speculation; investigate the plan which heaven has devised for our salvation; [and to] be ready to meet the Bridegroom!”⁴⁶⁵ The paper’s aim was enlarged to include a serialized “full history of the rise of the church of the Latter Day Saints, and the most interesting parts of its progress [that] would be worthy the perusal of the Saints.” Smith would provide the details.⁴⁶⁶ The relative safety in Kirtland for the next three years provided space for the Mormons to sharpen their abilities at agenda setting.

The Continual Assaults of 1835

Mentions of Mormonism in the American press dropped by nearly half from 1834 to 1835 to a known 186 articles. National news was no longer captivated by the two-year-old Missouri theme, and nothing of overt Mormon import arose to take its place. The Washington, D.C., *Army and Navy Chronicle* summarized the thoughts of the larger press: “To Correspondents — The communication upon ‘Mormonism’ is very interesting, but the subject does not appear suitable for the columns of the Chronicle. The MS [manuscript], shall be returned to the writer as requested.”⁴⁶⁷

Although in smaller numbers, a miscellany of Mormon topics was scattered

⁴⁶⁵ Oliver Cowdery, “Address,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 2.

⁴⁶⁶ Oliver Cowdery, *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 13.

⁴⁶⁷ “To Correspondents,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, November 26, 1835, 381. The *Chronicle* proposed, in addition to its explicit military purposes, to include “generally, every thing which may be supposed to give interest to its columns.” The Mormon discussion did not, apparently, meet this standard. “A Weekly Newspaper,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, June 30, 1834, 4.

across the pages of the 1835 press. Some of what American editors did print had familiar tones. The year began with a letter of “a gentleman of high respectability” published in the style of the denunciations of *Mormonism Unveiled*. Akin to Hurlbut’s findings, the 109-line epistle in newspapers in Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania discredited Smith’s beginnings. Ultimately, Smith was no more than “a fortune teller,” his “*golden plates of the Book of Mormon*” less than a “*pretended* curiosity,” and “he knows he is considered a false prophet and an imposter.”⁴⁶⁸ It is unknown if Smith held subscriptions to any of these papers; nevertheless, the unrelenting agenda setting of editors who persistently published unverified allegations of his young adult life was undoubtedly exasperating. Smith, with his single newspaper press in Kirtland, could never combat the agendas of hundreds of editors across the country who were crafting their own image of Mormonism for their subscribers.

“An Angel Caught”

A western New York paper in late 1834 produced the next irksome spur with its “curious account of a new adventure with the Mormons.”⁴⁶⁹ The faith-diluting account was written with skillfully flowing prose and without telltale exaggeration. Its believability and simple discrediting of Smith and Mormonism’s miracles made it the single most reproduced exchange article on Mormonism in the more than five years since its inception. For at least six of the perpetuating papers, this was their first article on

⁴⁶⁸ “Mormonism,” *Boston Courier*, December 4, 1834; italics in original; see also “Mormonism,” *Manufacturers’ and Farmers’ Journal*, December 11, 1834, 4; “Mormonism,” *Northampton Whig*, February 11, 1835, 1.

⁴⁶⁹ “Capture of a Mormon Angel,” *Pennsylvanian*, June 26, 1835, 2.

Mormonism. The unhindered replication is a staggering example of the compounding avalanche of print the Mormons faced at the hands of agenda-setting editors.

The story began with Smith seeking to add additional solemnity to the baptismal ceremony by reportedly promising that on each occasion an angel would appear on the opposite side of the stream. Accordingly, “a figure in white was seen ... and the faith of the faithful was thereby greatly increased.” However, “suspicions as to the incorporeal nature of the reputed angel ... induced a company of young men (unbelievers of course) to examine the quality of the ghost.”⁴⁷⁰ Having concealed themselves, the ambush was laid and “his Ghostship, after several most unghostlike attempts to escape and after a ducking in the river ... was taken bodily possession of, when it was found upon examination to be nothing more nor less than the Prophet himself.”⁴⁷¹ The twenty-five-line account concluded without analysis.

The escapade was reprinted from January to August 1835 in thirty-one known papers in twenty-one cities and across fourteen states—approximately two-thirds of the Union.⁴⁷² The article maintained its original composition through all but four of its printings, which demonstrates the efficiency of its agenda to show Smith’s penchant for deception. At a time when editors typically cut, copied, trimmed, expanded, and pasted

⁴⁷⁰ “An Angel Caught,” *Boston Courier*, June 25, 1835, 1; parenthetical statement in original.

⁴⁷¹ “Capture of a Mormon Angel,” *Fayetteville Observer*, July 7, 1835; spelling and capitalization in original.

⁴⁷² See, for example, “An Angel Caught,” *Connecticut Observer*, January 29, 1835, 102; “An Angel Caught,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 25, 1835, 3; “Capture of a Mormon Angel,” *Democratic Herald and Champion of the People*, June 27, 1835, 3; “An Angel Caught,” *Greenville Mountaineer*, July 18, 1835; “An Angel Caught!,” *Crawfordsville Record*, August 1, 1835, 4.

their own selections from the initial content, these editors, instead, let the original text (and agenda) speak for itself, and them. Moreover, this also indicates editors across the country shared prime components of the agenda against Mormonism. Otherwise they would have altered the telling with details to bend it to their own purposes.

Smith's contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville, described this American phenomenon: "When a great number of the organs of the press adopt the same line of conduct, and their influence becomes irresistible; and public opinion, when it is perpetually assailed from the same side, eventually yields to the attack."⁴⁷³ The supremacy of nineteenth-century print culture on the minds of American readers was unmatched. The Montpelier *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette* adeptly summarized the effect on the badgered Mormon leader: Smith was "stripped of his horrowed [*sic*] robes, and suffered to depart, literally a fallen angel."⁴⁷⁴

The Mormon Response

The Mormons were beyond exasperation at such stories. "We are sick of the loathsome smell" of "this filthy trash," the Mormon paper spewed.⁴⁷⁵ The July 1835 *Messenger and Advocate* recited the defunct angel defamation with a 111-line refutation. It reprinted the "slandorous slip" from the June 25, 1835, New York *Mercury*, which

⁴⁷³ de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1875, 1:187.

⁴⁷⁴ "A Miracle Turned to a Joke," *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette*, July 27, 1835; spelling in original. This is likely "harrowed," defined by the Oxford English Dictionary to be, in the early 1800s, *despoiled* or *violated*. See "Harrow, v.2," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017), <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/view/Entry/84375>.

⁴⁷⁵ "Who Shall Be Our President?," 441.

referenced a nonexistent issue of the Rochester *Republican* likely printed in December 1834 or early January 1835.⁴⁷⁶ This is striking because the Mormons were quoting the article from its fourth publication apparently uninformed that seven additional papers had likewise printed it by then and that twenty more papers had printed it by the date of their response. Aware of its New York circling, they had no idea it was being read through the exchange pathways consistently south to North and South Carolina and to the Western frontier.

The Mormon newspapermen were, nevertheless, not naïve that their feeble reproof would not venture far. “I do not suppose that the Messenger and Advocate will fall into the hands of but a few, if any, of those who severally read this ridiculous falsehood,” the editor brooded. Nonetheless, in light of the few thousand expected to read the rebuke, the Mormon editor considered the tale editors added “to the numerous catalogue [of rumors], framed by designing men, and put in circulation by them and their dupes” to have been sufficiently contradicted. The Mormon preoccupation with forestalling the effects of the fictional account leveled at unassuming readers is evident by their condemnation of the papers for influencing readers’ “opinion before a man can be heard, or his character and principles known.”⁴⁷⁷

Mormon Mummies

“Surely one half of the world are fools,” the Norwalk, Ohio, *Huron Reflector* printed in August 1835. “The Mormons have purchased of Mr. Chandler three of the

⁴⁷⁶ C., “SLANDEROUS,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 148.

⁴⁷⁷ C., 148–49.

Mummies which he recently exhibited in this village,” it explained. “Something of an opportunist and promoter,” Chandler had come into possession of the Egyptian mummies and papyri and exhibited them through the United States.⁴⁷⁸ He arrived in Kirtland in July 1835 and after meeting with Smith allowed him to take the papyri home to study. Smith announced the ancient documents contained the writings of the biblical Abraham and Joseph and arranged to purchase some of Chandler’s artifacts.⁴⁷⁹ The Mormons had a ready interest in the enigmatic bodies and hieroglyphs, which Smith set to interpreting and displaying for their fiscal and spiritual implications. The *Huron Reflector* was indignant: “With this shallow and contemptible story, [the Mormons have] commenced traveling about the country, and will no doubt gull multitudes into the belief of its truth.”⁴⁸⁰ No fewer than eleven papers in six states stretching more than a year took interest in the newly purchased Mormon antiquities.⁴⁸¹

The Mormons employed 425 lines in the *Messenger and Advocate* “for the purpose of correcting ... erroneous statements concerning both the mummies and also the

⁴⁷⁸ Of Chandler’s acquisition of the mummies, Bushman wrote, “Chandler’s account of the mummies is full of contradictions.” Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 286.

⁴⁷⁹ See Christopher C. Lund, “A Letter Regarding the Acquisition of the Book of Abraham,” *BYU Studies* 20, no. 4 (1980): 1–3; see also Kerry Muhlestein, “Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts: A Model for Evaluating the Prophetic Nature of the Prophet’s Ideas about the Ancient World,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2016): 35–82.

⁴⁸⁰ “Another Humbug,” *Huron Reflector*, August 11, 1835, 3.

⁴⁸¹ The September 1836 Hudson *Ohio Observer* departed from the more common skeptical articles on the Mormon mummies and presented a documentary-style account of a visitor who observed the artifacts with the assistance of a Mormon guide. See “The Mormons,” *Ohio Observer*, September 8, 1836, 98.

records.”⁴⁸² Of more value would have been a careful tracing and reprinting of non-Mormon editorials, for among the expected contempt were compliments both sarcastic and sincere. For example, the New York *Evening Star* wrote a witty column in September 1835 on the newest Mormon treasure. Even the obstreperous Howe temporarily laid aside his sharpness to reprint the slightly stinging satire of the *Evening Star* in his *Painesville (OH) Telegraph*. The sixty-two-line article spoke of the Egyptian artifacts as “a windfall for the Mormons,” bequeathed by “the goddess of good luck” who “lately threw two or three mummies in their way.” The Mormon brethren intended to “travel through the country and exhibit *bodily* evidence of the biblical authenticity of their faith.” Blatantly farcical, the text concluded with a potentially worrisome realism: “Mormonism fortified in this way by mummyism will be quite irresistible, and for all we know ... establish the Mormon religion in the United States!”⁴⁸³

The 1835 *Messenger and Advocate* contained more Mormon response to the American press than any previous year. However, the Mormons chose to ignore any possible benefit from the mummy commentaries and focused, instead, on other topics editors were printing about them.

⁴⁸² “Egyptian Mummies,” *Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, December 1835, 233.

⁴⁸³ “A Windfall for the Mormons,” *Painesville Telegraph*, September 4, 1835, 2; spelling, capitalization, and emphasis in original. The article in the New York *Evening Star* reprinted by the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* was not located. However, the *Telegraph* cites the *Star* as its source, though, unfortunately, without providing its date (as was typical of exchange articles).

Another Mormon Paper

“We expect shortly to publish a political paper weekly in favour of the present administration,” Smith announced. His object was forthright: “The influential men of that party have offered a liberal patronage to us and we hope to succeed for thereby we can shew the public the purity of our intention in supporting the government under which we live.”⁴⁸⁴ The overtly political Mormon paper, the Kirtland, Ohio, *Northern Times*, which began in February 1835, was received, instead, with mocking reprisals.

The paper, which “printed local and national news, editorialized on local, state, and national political issues, and endorsed candidates for public office,” had a rocky start. It was lampooned by the *Chardon (OH) Spectator* for giving birth to more extra additions than regular issues.⁴⁸⁵ The *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* brutalized its editor, Oliver Cowdery, for his loquaciousness,⁴⁸⁶ which was, as one reader wrote, “mostly filled with the lowest *cant*, and thread-bare hobbies of the tory prints.”⁴⁸⁷ Furthermore, Cowdery’s “Quixotic ferocity” sharpened the irony that when the proselytes first arrived in Kirtland they were commanded to “hold the least possible intercourse with ‘the world’—to avoid and abstain from all concerns of a public nature. But now they have entered *pell mell* into

⁴⁸⁴ Joseph Smith Jr., “Letter to Edward Partridge, 5 December 1833,” n.d., 69, The Joseph Smith Papers; spelling in original; see also “Letter to Edward Partridge, 5 December 1833, Page 69,” The Joseph Smith Papers, n. 41, accessed January 22, 2017, /paper-summary/letter-to-edward-partridge-5-december-1833/5.

⁴⁸⁵ Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, 1:51–52.

⁴⁸⁶ See “Great Accession to the Van Buren Cause,” *Painesville Telegraph*, February 20, 1835, 3.

⁴⁸⁷ “Extract of a Letter to the Editor of the Telegraph,” *Painesville Telegraph*, April 17, 1835, 3; italics in original.

the arena of political controversies.”⁴⁸⁸

American editors happily chided otherworldly prophecies of fanatical religionists, one of the six agendas identified against the Mormons. However, when those same prophets broached very physical, immediate politics and finances, ridicule turned to scorn for the blending of worlds. The Mormon printed incursion into politics was unacceptable to the agendas of other periodicals. The *United States Telegraph* of Washington City unleashed its derision, combining Mormonism with all other intolerable parasites.

All the Humbugites are rallying around Van Buren. Van Burenism is the common sewer for all the filth of the country.... We see by the Ohio State Journal, that the Mormons have established a paper in which they raise the tri-coloured flag. Mormon, Van Buren, and Johnson—Yellow, blue, and black! Three great humbugs.⁴⁸⁹

No fewer than twelve articles in 1835 in five Ohio newspapers and at least one in Illinois and another in Washington, D.C., responded to the creation and direction of this newest Mormon paper.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ “Great Accession to the Van Buren Cause,” 3; capitalization in original; “Extract of a Letter to the Editor of the Telegraph,” 3; spelling and italics in original.

⁴⁸⁹ The article continued, “The New York magician [Van Buren] is to be the Grand Interpreter of the Mormon Bible, *vice* Joe Smith, who will *resign* after the election of his old friend from New York! Joe is from New York, which has the honor of giving birth to the three great humbugs of the age--the Specie Currency, the Baltimore Caucus, and the Mormon Bible.” “Mormonism,” *United States Telegraph*, June 24, 1835; spelling, capitalization, and italics in original; see also “THE THREE GREAT HUMBUGS,” *Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette*, July 3, 1835, 3. Van Buren’s political sleight-of-hand in the 1817 Erie Canal legislation earned him the nickname, “The Little Magician.” Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 117. The Mormons later appealed to President Van Buren for redress for the Missouri depredations, but the person and party they had promoted would, instead, disappoint them with brash callousness.

⁴⁹⁰ See, for example, “[Illegible] into Notice,” *Painesville Telegraph*, July 10, 1835, 3; *Illinois Bounty Land Register*, July 24, 1835, 3; *Painesville Telegraph*, August 14, 1835, 3.

Editors were far more concerned with the emboldening political prowess manifesting itself in the *Northern Times* than they were of the fanatical spiritualism of the two versions of the *Evening and Morning Star* or the *Messenger and Advocate*. More frightful was that Mormon political madness was becoming matched with numerical muscle: “They now carry nearly a majority of this township, and every man votes as directed by the prophet and his elders,” the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* reported in April 1835. The vilifying agenda tied the diabolical Mormon intent, swaying votes, to the power to achieve heinous means, the population to do so—a combination that required reader reaction. A quick alarm was sounded that “caused the citizens to rally and make an effort, which by a small majority, saved the township from being governed by *revelation* for the year to come.”⁴⁹¹

The Mormon masses were becoming an independent and perpetual-motion monster. And, as Antonio Gramsci philosophized approximately half a century later, “Wherever there is power there arises resistance to it.”⁴⁹² The *Northern Times* and Mormon growth were ripe for the vilifying agendas of editors scattered through the country.

Robert Matthews, “Matthias the Prophet”

Smith’s Kirtland was colored with an unwelcomed association in the fall of 1835. “The notorious imposter Matthias has performed a pilgrimage to the temple of the

⁴⁹¹ “Extract of a Letter to the Editor of the Telegraph,” 3; capitalization and italics in original.

⁴⁹² Roger Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), 75.

equally notorious Joe Smith, where he held forth his doctrines,” the *Painesville Telegraph* began in November 1835. Howe’s humor then heightened: “It appears that the new pretender met with less encouragement than he anticipated from the Latter Day-ites, and after a two days’ conference, the *Prophets* parted, each declaring he had miraculously discerned the devil in the other!”⁴⁹³

The imposter was a certain infamous Robert Matthews clad in his hallmark green frock coat, Wellington boots, two-edged sword of Gideon, tassels of the Twelve Tribes, full head of hair and beard⁴⁹⁴—and, by the time he visited Smith in Kirtland, he was not long since released from jail and dubiously escaped from the manslaughter charges that sent him there. Smith recalled the visit and the minister’s singular appearance.⁴⁹⁵ Though he initially concealed his identity, Smith’s saints swiftly suspected him to be the histrionic Matthews, publicly considered a murderer despite the court’s findings.⁴⁹⁶

William L. Stone Sr.—abolitionist, Freemason, and newspaperman—lambasted

⁴⁹³ “Prophet Catch Prophet,” *Painesville Telegraph*, November 20, 1835, 3; spelling and italics in original.

⁴⁹⁴ See Johnson and Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*; see also Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 274–78.

⁴⁹⁵ See Joseph Smith Jr., “Conversations with Robert Matthews, 9-11 November 1835,” n.d., 22, The Joseph Smith Papers.

⁴⁹⁶ Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, authors of the foremost treatise on Robert Matthews observed of the inflamed press that, “Had the courtroom spectators been in charge of Matthias’s fate, the outcome would have been uncomplicated: ‘almost every body here,’ one newspaper reported, ‘is in favor of hanging the prophet.’” Johnson and Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*, 158–59. One of the notorious penny press papers, *The (NY) Sun*, was a hearty participant in Matthias’s trial by newspaper, collecting and printing its serialized, dramatized articles in a single novelette. See *Memoirs of Matthias the Prophet, with a Full Exposure of His Atrocious Impositions, and of the Degrading Delusions of His Followers* (New York: New York Sun, 1835).

the nationally disconcerting Matthias and his “ultraism” in a full-length book published in 1835. To Smith’s chagrin, Stone’s written documentary likewise mentioned Smith with an occasional parallel castigation using the notoriety of the one to debase the other. Stone quoted the New Testament Peter’s warning of “the long array of apostates and deceivers” in the last days, among whom were Matthias and “the sensual Mormons.”⁴⁹⁷ The blending of anti-Matthias and anti-Mormon rhetoric was a double blow to each.

Smith invited Matthias to preach to the Mormon public and held private interviews with him. He was soon not impressed. “I told him that his doctrine was of the Devil that he was in reality in possession of a wicked and depraved spirit.” Finally, as Matthias’s doctrines waxed woeful and Smith’s hospitality waned, Smith announced, “I told him, that my God told me that his God is the Devil, and I could not keep him any longer, and he must depart, and so I for once cast out the Devil in bodily shape, & I believe a murderer.”⁴⁹⁸

Smith was well-aware of Matthias’s poisonous presence in the “public prints”⁴⁹⁹ and had a strong desire to distance his dogmas from Matthias’s murderous machinations. The American press, on the other hand, was gleeful to make the association. No fewer than twelve papers in six states linked the prophets. The attribution of the *Portsmouth (NH) Journal* of November 1835 was simple but its agenda of emphasizing the fanaticism of Mormonism by intertwining the two was no less than worrisome to the

⁴⁹⁷ William L. Stone, *Matthias and His Impostures*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), 5, 13–14, 17, 25, 28; italics in original.

⁴⁹⁸ Smith Jr., “Conversations with Robert Matthews, 9-11 November 1835,” 29; capitalization in original.

⁴⁹⁹ Smith Jr., 28.

Mormons: “MATTHIAS, alias ‘the prophet,’ has, it is said, reached the land of the Mormons in Ohio, where his doctrines meet with general favor” (which they did not).⁵⁰⁰ And, the Keene *New Hampshire Sentinel*’s slight separation of the two was still an agenda-setting denigration of both: “Matthias went to join the Mormons—but his ideas were too gross even for them.”⁵⁰¹

The Mormon *Northern Light* (Kirtland, OH) went quickly on the defensive, as was noticed by the Bloomington, Indiana, *Post*:

The “Northern Light,” published at Kirkland [*sic*], Ohio,... repels the statement that Matthias has been taken into fellowship by the disciples of Jo Smith, with great indignation. The Prophet [Matthias] went among that interesting people and was treated “civilly and clemently by them,” says the Northern Light,” but they told him in so many words that his doctrines were the evil one, and he himself a vile imposter. We do not know how the Mormons look upon it, but it does not strike us that this was either very civil or very clement.⁵⁰²

In the hyperspirituality of the early 1800s, Smith was not the only visionary who claimed interaction with the divine. Moreover, Smith was not the only one whose otherworldly claims placed a community on a collision course with society. He was, nevertheless, concerned when the clashes of others threatened intersection with his own and rushed the defensive Mormon agenda to offset misconceptions to the press.

Mormon newspapers were as quick as others to denounce fanaticism contrived

⁵⁰⁰ “Matthias,” *Portsmouth Journal*, November 7, 1835, 1; capitalization in original.

⁵⁰¹ *New Hampshire Sentinel*, December 10, 1835, 3.

⁵⁰² “Matthias and the Mormons,” *The Post*, August 4, 1836, 4; spelling and quotation marks in original. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *clement* as, “mild and humane in the exercise of power or authority; merciful, lenient, kindly, toward subjects or those in one’s power.” “Clement,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

from ultraspiritualism, particularly that of Matthias.⁵⁰³ The newspaper-enabled conjoining of these American prophets was, however, too tight to be severed despite Mormon efforts.⁵⁰⁴ To Latter Day Saint⁵⁰⁵ disdain, Matthias had melded irrevocably into Mormon identity, courtesy of the efforts of editors to associate American contempt for one with the other.

“Heathen Temples on Lake Erie”

Ohioans were apprised in August 1833, some two years after the Mormon arrival in Kirtland, that the believers had “contemplated erecting a building of stone on a magnificent plan, to be called after the one erected by King Solomon, ‘*The Temple*.’”⁵⁰⁶ As the temple grew, so did the fascination of readers. No fewer than five papers in 1835 through Ohio, Massachusetts, New York, and Indiana, and a sixth paper, the *True Sun* in London, England, tipped a portion of text to the temple. Londoners in November 1835 were enlightened with an exchange article from New York submitted by its paper’s correspondent:

⁵⁰³ See “MILLERISM—FANATICISM,” *Times and Seasons*, September 1, 1843, 370.

⁵⁰⁴ See Willford Woodruff, “Fox Islands, Vinalhaven Me-Nov. 20th 1837,” *Elders’ Journal*, November 1837, 18.

⁵⁰⁵ The name of Smith’s church changed from “Church of Christ” to “Church of the Latter Day Saints,” on May 3, 1834. See “Name of Church Changed – Details,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 24, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/event/name-of-church-changed>. The current iteration of the name of the Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was announced on April 26, 1838. See “Name of Church Clarified – Details,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 24, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/event/name-of-church-clarified>.

⁵⁰⁶ “Mormonites,” *Western Courier*, August 22, 1833, 2; italics in original.

A NEW RACE OF FANATICS, THE MORMONS. “[The] Temple of the Lord,” in Kirtland ... is a stone edifice, 58 feet 8 inches by 78 feet 8 inches, two full stories high, with dormer windows in the roof, which give it a singular appearance.... The house is rather an expensive one, the writer adds, built by the poor people, who, in their delusion, follow Joe Smith and Rigdon.⁵⁰⁷

The common agenda of the contributing editors to underscore Mormon fanaticism, credulity and gullibility emphasized the preposterousness of the task assumed by a perplexing sect rife with poverty.

The editors’ prose was sharp. The *Salem (MA) Gazette* replicated in October 1835 a “Heathen Temples on Lake Erie” article published by a nonextant *New York Star*. It referenced the building’s instigator in the fourteen-line text as the “bold-faced imposter, Joe Smith, of Golden Bible and Mormon memory.” It concluded poetically and unabashedly: “We should think this work of iniquity extorted out of the pockets of his dupes, as it reflects its shadow over the blue lake, would make the waters *crimson* with shame at the prostitution of its beautiful banks to such unhallowed purposes.”⁵⁰⁸ It was vilifying terminology to paint a picture of abhorrent Mormon works and purposes.

Surprisingly, the Mormon organ rejoiced in its temple only twice before its completion and ignored the opposing commentary. Instead, its columns centered on the difficulty of the nearly insurmountable feat as adversaries “calculated to retard the progress of the building.” Both Mormon articles were sparse on defining details, stating only that “the dome of the steeple will be not far from 110 feet high, and the bell about

⁵⁰⁷ The article included speculation about the strange eight-inch increment added to the round-number dimensions. “A New Race of Fanatics, the Mormons,” *True Sun*, November 27, 1835, 3; capitalization in original.

⁵⁰⁸ “Heathen Temples on Lake Erie,” *Salem Gazette*, October 13, 1835, 1; italics in original.

ninety [feet high].” The cost, as of July 1835, was “computed at about *ten thousand dollars*, and the whole cost, when finished, will probably be from twenty to thirty thousand.”⁵⁰⁹ To hasten the structure’s completion, the task of the October issue of the *Messenger and Advocate* was an outright plea for Mormons wherever they were to donate money, goods, and time to assist its progress. Prophetic pledges followed to elevate the labor “to finish the house of the Lord this winter [of 1835].”⁵¹⁰

Although pages of the Mormon press were now regularly responding to American print, there was no interchange on the subject of the temple, neither did the American press take note of the Mormon texts on this matter. Such little discussion of the matter in these early years of Mormon temple building was likely the result of the fact that neither the Mormons or non-Mormons conceived of the future import of temples to Mormonism. To those outside the faith in 1834 it was additional proof of a profligate Mormon mind, which exuded characteristics of the agendas of Mormon fanaticism or dishonesty and broached another of the six non-Mormon agendas, Mormon leaders’ criminality. What interest there was in the temple emphasized the telestial structure of the building as opposed to the forthcoming celestial rituals, ill-defined even for the Mormons at this point, that would “[transform] the profane into the sacred.”⁵¹¹ Thus passed the print of

⁵⁰⁹ “The House of God,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 147; italics in original.

⁵¹⁰ “THE HOUSE OF THE LORD,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 207; spelling and emphases in original.

⁵¹¹ Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World’s Religions in Sociological Perspective*, 34. Sociologist Lester R. Kurtz’s work is a noteworthy study of New Religious Movements (NRMs) and practical examples of the ideas of Durkheim and Geertz.

1835.

Conclusion

The newness of Mormonism both in Kirtland and in the nation had worn off by the end of 1832. Nevertheless, editors' agenda-setting assumed the sharper, specific effort to cast them as a social enemy. Editors in 1833 gradually honed their vilifying invectives. More than name-calling or taunting, the creation of a Mormonite villain that threatened the larger national good was becoming more calculated. No fewer than seventeen articles in the exchange exhibited characteristics of Vilification Theory against the Mormons in 1833 across Ohio, Pennsylvania, Arkansas Territory, New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Delaware, and Washington City. At least six of the papers originated in Ohio. Three papers aided the vilification stage of the conceptual Identification of the Enemy by defining themselves against the opposition through characterizing the Mormons as "wretched zealots" who, as a group, "cordially unite in detesting all, save Mormons."⁵¹² Thus, of human instinct, all but the most critically objective readers naturally aligned themselves mentally against such a prejudiced enemy when encountered in print or discussion, and physically if met in person.

Portrayal of the adversary and attributing diabolical motives is distinct on the pages of seven different papers. The calculating editors reproduced the image of a corrupt and amoral adversary who was contemptuous, unintelligent, or treated others (the communal "us") with indifference or disparagement. Editors further embodied the diabolical Mormon motives of intending to injure those with whom readers identified

⁵¹² "Mormons," *Harrisburg Chronicle*, January 3, 1833, 1.

themselves (e.g., family, friends, country, etc.). For example, the Bellows Falls *Vermont Chronicle* and four other papers reported that the efforts of a committee of villagers rightly terrified of an outbreak of smallpox had “been hindered by a sect calling themselves Mormonites who profess to believe that the disorder will not attack them, neither would they spread it.” The anger continued that notwithstanding the Mormon belief, one had been seized with the disease and it was feared their indifference would spread the dreaded contagion.⁵¹³ Such a report ignited an emotional response to Mormon disregard to the general well-being of human life, who, in additional papers were authoritatively said to have “*predatory* habits.”⁵¹⁴ It was un-American to not be indignant against such a callused, calculating foe.

Lastly, an opponent’s power must be carefully magnified to provoke movement against it or to prevent its advance. “Wherever Mormonism obtained a footing,” the Newark, Ohio, *Advocate* republished, “it spread like wild fire.”⁵¹⁵ Additionally, the “reign of Mormonism” surpassed all previous alarming “-isms” that had been “offensive to common sense, or degrading to human nature,” the Cambridge, Ohio, *Guernsey Times* warned.⁵¹⁶ Mormon influence was styled in such a manner that readers were intended to

⁵¹³ “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” *Vermont Chronicle*, May 24, 1833. See also “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” *Portsmouth Journal*, May 25, 1833, 2; “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” *The Aurora*, May 30, 1833, 3; “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” *Huron Reflector*, June 4, 1833, 2.

⁵¹⁴ “Mormonism,” August 17, 1833; italics in original. The article was taken from a nonextant issue of the *Wilmington State Journal*.

⁵¹⁵ “Mormons,” *The Advocate*, April 13, 1833, 2.

⁵¹⁶ *Guernsey Times*, November 15, 1833, 2. The article was reprinted from a nonextant *Bangor Courier*.

think that it was only a matter of time before the contagion swept the country unchecked, bringing with it a host of terrors as so many of the nation's feared epidemics did in the nineteenth century.

The New Haven, Connecticut, *Religious Intelligencer* solemnly forewarned against the spreading of the harmful ideas and practices as if there was no risk of infection:

Let no one imagine [Mormonism is] so fraught with absurdity, as to be harmless. It has already extended into two-thirds of the states of the Union. Some hundred [Mormon] preachers ... are scattered over the land and their '*Morning and Evening Star*' ... circulates extensively.⁵¹⁷

And, lest with Third-Person Effect⁵¹⁸ one considered him or herself immune, the writer warned that those in the reaches of the far west were no more susceptible than more enlightened New Englanders who had furnished their "full share of proselytes to this new heresy." Frightfully, the Mormons had churches in sixteen of the United States.⁵¹⁹ The dangers of this growing cultural villain might be abated if true Americans rose up in defense of freedom and life and eradicated the disease.

Vilification Theory declares that evidence of vilification efforts by one party is strengthened by the discovery of vilification endeavors by the opposite party. Mormon

⁵¹⁷ Bluffdale, "Mormonism," 118; italics in original.

⁵¹⁸ Third-Person Effect Theory postulates that "a person exposed to a persuasive communication in the mass media sees this as having a greater effect on others than on himself or herself." Those exposed to the message admit to having concern for others who are more likely to be influenced than themselves but who, for no specific reason, are not susceptible to its effects. W. Phillips Davison, "The Third-Person Effect in Communication," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47 (1983): 1; see also Richard M. Perloff, "The Third-Person Effect: A Critical Review and Synthesis," *Media Psychology* 1 (2000): 353–78.

⁵¹⁹ Bluffdale, "Mormonism," 247.

vilification energies in the nascent *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Independence, MO) were, compared to their American editor counterparts, less practiced and loosely generalized. They centered on the Portrayal of the Adversary stage of vilification wherein activists define themselves as moral agents fighting against evil. Mormon revelations printed in the *Star* consistently emphasized Mormon righteousness amid a wicked world. Book of Mormon scripture was enlisted to command the unbelieving country to “turn ... from your wicked ways, and repent of all your evil doings, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts.”⁵²⁰ Mormon vilification exertions were underpinned by God’s definition that the Mormons were the righteous and the rest were the wicked, an unprovable categorization.

Thus, as American vilification labors crafted a mortal foe against which their readers’ could perpetrate physical action, Mormon readers were encouraged to act on a spiritual plane according to the triumph of light in a dualistic theodicy, “the righteous have nought to fear; the promise of deliverance to them is certain; though the heathen rage, though bigots cry delusion, yet they know that those who put their trust in the Lord, will never be confounded.”⁵²¹ Although American editors were shaping and beginning to prevail over a corporeal foe, the Mormons were engaged in a cosmic war⁵²² where

⁵²⁰ “From the Book of Mormon,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, June 1832, 8; spelling in original.

⁵²¹ “All Must Come To Pass,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, April 1833, 6; spelling in original.

⁵²² A “cosmic war” is “a conflict in which God is believed to be directly engaged on one side over the other.” It is waged both on the physical and spiritual plane, and there can be no compromise, negotiation, settlement, or surrender. It is both unwinnable and

persecution and death were trophies of triumph.

The Missouri violence against the Mormon press and community in Jackson County, Missouri, provided facile vilifying ammunition against the Mormons that proved effective in shaping the Mormon cultural villain, which was becoming ingrained in the general perception. Mormonism had been associated with other declared fanaticisms; however, in 1834, a striking identification surfaced for the first time.

Antislavery and antiabolitionist arguments raged on the pages of the American press. Antiabolitionists were sorely displeased during an 1834 New York Fourth of July celebration when the obstreperous Lewis Tappan, an uncompromising New York abolitionist, undertook to follow the traditional public reading of the Constitution with a reading of the Constitution of the Anti-Slavery Society. To some vocal audience members, the comparison was unconscionable. In reporting the matter, the *New York Spectator* excoriated the intolerable abolitionists as “less justifiable and more mischievous than the Mormons of the West. They are the Black Mormons of the East.”⁵²³ The nearby *Emancipator* snapped back at the “whole billingsgate fiction,” calling attention to the improbability of various points of the *Spectator*’s story.⁵²⁴ The moniker had staying power, though, because a year later the New York *Quarterly Anti-Slavery*

unlosable. It is fought over identity. Reza Aslan, *How to Win a Cosmic War: Globalization, and the End of the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2009), 5–10.

⁵²³ “The Fourth of July,” *New York Spectator*, July 7, 1834, 2.

⁵²⁴ “The Cause of the Excitements,” *Emancipator and Journal of Public Morals*, July 22, 1834, 1; punctuation updated for readability. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *Billingsgate* as the fish market near one of the gates of the city of London, noted for vituperative language. “Billingsgate,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Magazine gave a discourse on name-calling. “*Names* go great way in making things attractive or repulsive,” it lectured, as in the case of the New York pro-slavery mob that spewed “such appellations, as ‘fanatics,’ ‘incendiaries,’ [and] ‘black mormons of the East.’”⁵²⁵ This vilification tactic of Identification of the Enemy was double-edged. It cleverly labeled Mormons with three nineteenth-century cultural denigrations of black skin, of slaves, and of white northern abolitionists. Mormons had become a national byword at the hands of vilifying editors.

The plaguing story of the Mormon preacher drowning while attempting to walk on water possessed an element of Portrayal of the Adversary by postulating an amoral belief system perpetuated by priestcraft. Such deceptive tactics, inescapable to the Mormons for its persistent replication, required Americans to maintain unwearied skepticism at the appearance of Mormon missionaries or members wherever they appeared. Righteous indignation was likewise requisitioned to “avert the evils which threaten the Public by ... Joseph Smith Jun. otherwise known as the Mormon Prophet.”⁵²⁶ Zion’s Camp, the Kirtland Mormon army led by Smith to restore Missouri Mormons to their lands in 1834, provided adequate munition for the stage of Attributing Diabolical Motives to the Mormons with its treacherous intent to injure Missouri home and country. “This thing has arrived at a crisis which is really appalling to the feelings of good men, [and] we feel it a duty to inform our readers of the movements of this [army who number]

⁵²⁵ “A Review –The Principles of Reform,” *Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine*, October 1835, 47; italics and capitalization in original.

⁵²⁶ “To the Public,” January 31, 1834, 3; capitalization in original; see also “To the Public,” April 22, 1834, 1.

700 strong.”⁵²⁷

The diabolical motives were conveyed to the readers of the July 1834 *Baltimore Patriot*. Mormon soldiers had no fear of death “for Smith, *their prophet*, had promised to raise all of them that should be *slain* in fighting the Lord’s battles.” The 314-line series of evidences continued: “The arrival of such a body of armed troops, whose object was to butcher a portion of our citizens, aroused the whole country against them.” If left unhindered, there was no question that not “one would have been left to tell the tale. No quarter would have been given.” Twice the article rearticulated that the Mormon land of Zion was, per their own openly published revelations, to be obtained “by PURCHASE or by BLOOD, otherwise there is [no] inheritance for [them].” Ultimately, the Mormons were “determined, at all hazards, and regardless of all consequences, to shake and convulse not only Jackson, but the surrounding counties, to their very centre, and to imbrue the whole upper Missouri in blood and carnage”⁵²⁸ if their threat to Missouri American basic needs and values could not be quelled. This vilifying report of the vicious Mormons circled the foremost papers in the nation’s capital in 1834 at the same time it made its exchange journey to Connecticut and Ohio.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ “The Mormon War,” *Torch Light*, July 10, 1834, 1; see also “The Mormon War,” *Richmond Enquirer*, July 8, 1834, 2; “The Mormon War,” *Western Courier*, July 10, 1834, 2; “The Mormon War,” *Painesville Telegraph*, July 11, 1834, 3.

⁵²⁸ “The Mormon Controversy,” *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, July 24, 1834, 2; emphases in original; see also “The Mormon Controversy,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 23, 1834; “The Mormon Controversy,” *The Advocate*, August 2, 1834, 2.

⁵²⁹ See, for example, “Propositions of the Mormons,” *United States Telegraph*, July 24, 1834; “The Mormon Controversy,” *Connecticut Courant*, August 4, 1834, 1; “Propositions of the Mormons,” *The Aurora*, July 31, 1834, 2.

Another essential stage in the rhetorical process of vilification is articulating the enemy's ability to enact the published terrors. Six newspapers over ten months and six hundred miles provided the proof. For example, the *Washington City Daily National Intelligencer* of October 1834 announced that a Mormonite preacher asserted the sect numbered "20,000, and 800 preachers, with two printing offices, two stores, and a large stone edifice, for a house of worship." The Mormon monster had become massive. "These facts, if true, are a sad commentary on the conservative power of human reason against the inroads of one of the most audacious impostures that ever disgraced the annals of mankind."⁵³⁰ Countless editors across the country were achieving a vilifying agenda in the minds of Americans and, by 1834, the Mormon cultural villain was clearly identified, unmistakably purposed, and imbibed with powerful and deadly potential.

In July 1834, twelve high-profile Mormon men led by W. W. Phelps crafted a text according to their agenda to dispel, correct, or offset damaging descriptions that was intended to counter the vilifying agendas in circulation. Printed in the Kirtland *Star* and entitled "An Appeal," it was 592 lines—10.5 double-spaced pages in a word processor—of persecuted and patriotic pathos to humanize the beleaguered Mormon people to the nation. "We are citizens of this Republic and we ask our rights as republicans, not merely in our restoration to our lands ... but in being considered honest in our faith, honest in our deal[ings], and honest before God." The text was rearranged into an Extra, which was mailed to various newspapers and reprinted in at least one. However, insufficient was the Mormon attempt to put a human face to themselves to counter the animosity growing

⁵³⁰ "One Gladden Bishop," *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 2, 1834; see also October 23, 1834, 1; October 31, 1834, 2; November 6, 1834, 2; February 28, 1835; G. R., "Mormonism and Christianity," 90–91.

toward what editors were describing as an alien mass of manic Mormons. “We hereby APPEAL for peace to the ends of the earth, and ask the protection of all people,” the Mormons implored. Some sympathies were expressed in the press. Nonetheless, it was unrealistic to hope that their printed plea to convince the great family of mankind that their object was peace and good will⁵³¹ could dissuade a reading public from the Mormon fiend established in the agendas of the 1,215 articles written by the end of 1834.

Instances of vilification in 1835 are remarkably absent from the nearly two hundred articles written about the Mormons. That omission may have been due to the dwindling concern over events in Jackson County, Missouri. Since nothing of overt Kirtland import arose to replace it, editors returned to their simple mocking of Mormon imprudence in place of calculated vilifying tactics for their destruction.

The one dagger flung in January 1835 by the New Hampshire *Farmer’s Gazette*—the agenda of gullibility—landed not on the Mormons, but on what should have been a vigilant American public. The continual conversion to the Book of Mormon “at this enlightened day, is enough to draw a deep blush of burning shame for the ‘gullibility’ and senseless credulity of our fellow-citizens.” Editors regularly lamented both the “superlative nonsense and transcendent foolishness” of Mormonism *and* the inconceivable fact of once-discerning Americans who chose to be degraded by it.⁵³²

The July 25, 1835, Philadelphia *Temple of Reason* worriedly foretold the

⁵³¹ W. W. Phelps et al., “An Appeal,” *Evening and Morning Star*, August 1834, 364; capitalization and emphases in original; see also “The Appeal,” *Evening and Morning Star*, July 1834, 361; for more information, see Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, 1:46–47.

⁵³² “The Book of Mormon,” *Farmer’s Gazette*, January 30, 1835, 2.

implausible success of the Mormon faith. Despite their ludicrous claims to work miracles, heal the sick, walk on water, and call down angels, “we hazard nothing in saying that a little persecution is alone wanting to place Mormonism on a footing with Christianity, if not in advance of it ... and point out Jo Smith and his followers, as dangerous rivals to the son of Mary and the fishers of Galilee.”⁵³³ The “Mormon *delusion*” would only be such “till age and success have dignified them with the name of religion.”⁵³⁴

The 848 articles on Mormonism in the American press from 1833 to 1835 were a gradual increase in articles per year since the Mormons arrived in Kirtland and both the non-Mormon and Mormon presses engaged each of their respective agendas. Interest dropped dramatically in 1835 as Missouri events faded from the spotlight as editors, by nature, continually sought after the latest news. Critical commentary equated to 29 percent of the artifacts of this time frame; 59 percent reported neutrally—the increase a result of American editors considering the legality of the Missouri violence against the Mormons; and, 1 percent wrote with sympathetic ends. Less than 1 percent of articles portrayed Mormonism in these years in positive tones. The number of newspapers that commented on Mormonism rose from 151 to 192 in ninety-seven cities through twenty-five states and territories and reaching to upper Canada and London, England. Smith was

⁵³³ G. R., “Mormonism and Christianity,” 90–91; italics and spelling in original.

⁵³⁴ G. R., 90–91; italics in original. The Philadelphia *Temple of Reason* was a “radical newspaper” published by Russel Canfield that “promised opposition to the Christian party and politics, but the primary focus was theological with attacks on the Bible and revealed religion.” It shouted that Christianity was dangerous to civil liberty and “scorned Bible societies, Sabbath laws, judicial oaths,” and religious tests in state constitutions. J. William Frost, *A Perfect Freedom: Religious Liberty in Pennsylvania*, Cambridge Studies in Religion and American Public Life (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 96. Its masthead proclaimed: “Devoted to Free Inquiry, Moral Science, Universal Education, and Human Happiness.”

the subject of more than 1,418 articles since learning of the gold plates and by 1835, his exasperation with the press was regularly apparent. The Mormons counteracted with three of their own newspapers with editors bearing different approaches of how much effort was spent trumping falsehoods with truth, chronicling the emerging Mormon history, and consolidating and presenting Mormon identity to its member readers.

Vilification efforts in these years were incisive: the Mormon enemy was clearly defined and threatened the dearest ties to family and national liberties. Editors multiplied Mormon numbers as many as ten-fold to magnify Mormon power and the moral need to quell it. But, the Mormons were not without their own vilifying exertions. Their opponent, the lying and deceiving nation they described in the Kirtland *Star*, was divinely defined and the battlefield transposed worlds. Death was not a loss and temporary corporeal setbacks were overlaid with eternal, ethereal covenants. The agenda-setting press, caustic and unwieldy, was by sheer numbers in overwhelming favor of the vastly non-Mormon nation. The agendas of the American press were working. Scholar Terryl Givens observed about nineteenth-century America that “popular depictions of Mormonism revealed and exploited any number of anxieties and contradictions involving a vast readership’s sense of self and the nation.”⁵³⁵ The repetition of an unfavorable Mormon visage in the known 1,304 articles written since the Mormons arrived in Kirtland predisposed a global audience against them.

The events found across the pages of the press in Mormon Kirtland’s next and final two years of 1836 and 1837 described in Chapter 7 ends, literally, with the press

⁵³⁵ Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy*, 4.

aflame, scorching the nearby and soon-abandoned temple as the building assemblage of
Mormons returned to Missouri for a fresh start.

CHAPTER 7

THE ROLE OF VILIFYING AGENDAS IN THE DOWNFALL OF MORMONISM IN KIRTLAND, OHIO, 1836-1837

*Joe Smith, the high priest and prophet of the
Mormons is now in Jail ... for attempting to
shoot one of his backsliding brethren, in com-
pliance with a revelation, which, said he,
required his death.*
Camden Commercial Courier, June 24, 1837⁵³⁶

Introduction

“I have seldom, if ever,” wrote S. A. Davis, editor of the *Glad Tidings and Ohio Christian Telescope*, “been treated with greater kindness by any denomination of Christians, or seen manifested more liberality of sentiment and Christian charity, than by the ‘Latter Day Saints,’ during my visit among them.” Such munificence was a rare commodity for the Mormons in Kirtland. They considered a visiting editor to have priceless potential for what favorable things he might print and ensured he was treated with all possible hospitality. It worked. “On the whole,” Davis closed his 140-line report, “our visit to Kirtland, was a pleasant one, and notwithstanding I am as far from believing their doctrine as any person can be, yet I must say that they manifested a spirit of liberality, and Christianity, which many of their bitterest persecutors would do well to

⁵³⁶ *Camden Commercial Courier*, June 24, 1837, col. b.

imitate.”⁵³⁷ The compliments were made more powerful because of his nonbelieving attitude—showing, the Mormons hoped, that insiders and outsiders could disagree without being disagreeable. It was with eagerness but experiential caution that the Mormons looked for the resulting *Glad Tidings* issue.

The Mormons reciprocated in their *Messenger and Advocate* the following month, April 1837. As for Davis’s disbelief in their doctrines, they gently retorted, “We can truly reiterate the same sentiment with regard to his, but because we consider him a gentleman, and pays that respect to our feelings, [it is] our character and our religion that entitles him to acts of kindness and reciprocity from us.” Although some of Davis’s commentary required rebutting (detailed later in this chapter), the editorial was for the Mormon agenda of dispelling, correcting, or offsetting incorrect perceptions worth reprinting, which the Mormons did in its entirety. The summary concluded:

We consider them gentlemen, of liberal minds, of correct republican principles, evincing by their conduct here, and the article we have copied from their paper, their willingness that we, and all others, should believe as we please, and worship God agreeably to the dictates of our own consciences.⁵³⁸

By 1837, the Mormons were well-practiced with their own presses and were adroitly participating in the processes of the nineteenth-century print culture of setting their agendas. Although (and because) their texts were severely outnumbered, Mormon leadership and editors expended sacred and specific effort capitalizing on the columns of their American counterparts.

⁵³⁷ S. A. Davis, “Kirtland,--Mormonism, &c.,” *Glad Tidings and Ohio Christian Telescope*, March 14, 1837, 263. The newspaper was published simultaneously in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

⁵³⁸ *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, April 1837, 489–90.

This chapter concludes the cultural history drawn from more than 1,600 pages of newspapers about the Mormons in Kirtland, Ohio. The year 1836 saw a 26 percent drop in articles on Mormonism from the previous year—the second lowest in their Kirtland stay—but an increase in the sharpness of vilifying prose. Then, of the 166 articles written in 1837, editors were concerned with only two events: the collapse of the Mormon banking enterprise and the purported attempted “martyrdom” of one Grandison Newell. Vilification efforts in 1837 were surprisingly curtailed as the Mormons suffered a thorough apostasy and fled their homes and temple for a new start in the prairies of Far West, Missouri. Four of the six non-Mormon agendas are clearly evident in these two years as well as all four Mormon agendas.

The 1836 Wane

The fantastic was fleeting in the press of the 1800s and what was one day a matter of fearfulness was soon replaced or forgotten without constant reiteration. Such were the Mormons of 1836. The Cincinnati *Western Literary Journal* observed in September 1836 that “something very new, and a little marvelous” had recently sprung up inasmuch that “Mormonism will cease to be a wonder.”⁵³⁹ Replaced as an American marvel, Mormonism found its way into only 137 articles in 1836, which was nearly tied with 1832 for the lowest printed interest in the seven-year stay in Kirtland. Editors set their agendas in 1836 by replicating letters to the editor filled with dissections of Mormon

⁵³⁹ “Editor’s Budget: Something Very New, and a Little Marvellous,” *Western Literary Journal and Monthly Review*, September 1836, 283. The “something new” was Girolamo Segato’s (1792-1836) modern process of mummification or “petrification,” which, because of its shocking preservation of human and animal features and hair color, bordered dangerously in the time on witchcraft.

doctrine, character, and practices.

Lengthy Letters of 1836

The reduction in quantity of 1836 articles did not equate to their diminished corrosive vilification qualities—a characteristic of written correspondence. Letters to American editors on Mormonism were not uncommon since its birth. Newspapers enjoyed reproducing the typically highly detailed, instantly authenticated, first-person observations and intercourse with the Mormons as an effectual means of shaping opinions about Mormonism. Though they sometimes contained complimentary attributions, the letters of 1836 were cast of a harsher die.

A Leveling Letter

A certain James H. Eells wrote the *New York Evangelist* in the spring of 1836 a comprehensive 176-line account of his visit to Kirtland—the equivalent of approximately seven double-spaced pages in today’s word processor. His observations were thorough and descriptively disemboweling. The letter began with the observation that followers of Smith and Mahomet “both owe their origin to a person in the lowest ranks of life, almost totally illiterate, with scraps of religion, and superstition, and mysticism about him” and who, from time to time, received direct revelations from heaven. The Mormon members, aside from their delusion, had the appearance of being devout Christians. Eells wrote that they all received revelations continually and “every impulse is an immediate revelation [by which] they answer all difficulties and objections by asserting that *they know* that they have the truth, for it comes directly from heaven.” His opinion of the system of perpetual revelation was, that “there never was a more bald, senseless, drivelling,

collection of trash, put together in the form of a book than the book of Mormon and the Supplementary Revelations.”⁵⁴⁰ The first-person assessment provided legitimacy to the *Evangelist*’s agenda of portraying a fanatical, irrational faith.

The column then aimed at the relatively new practice of describing Smith’s physical characteristics:

Smith is apparently about thirty-five years of age, and is evidently a singular being. He is very plausible and polite in his manners, has an eye that glistens like a serpent’s, and it is perpetually flying about to find some object on which to rest. His lips are firmly compressed, and he wears an eternal smile of self-complacency on his features, and has all the air of one who is conscious of having communion with invisible spirits, whether good or bad you are at a loss to determine. He has been a money-digger and necromancer from his youth, and his father before him. His character is undoubtedly about an equal compound of the imposter and the fanatic, and combines all the features of the knave and the dupe.⁵⁴¹

Eells’s description indicates he was aware of the agendas editors had been setting to create a nefarious past for Smith, which he intertwined into Smith’s physical description.

The exchange is strikingly devoid of full-length reprints of this letter-turned-article. Its introductory lines declared the place of writing to be Elyria, Ohio, approximately fifty-two miles south and west of Kirtland. Newspapers in Ohio, Connecticut, New York, and Washington City were aware of the letter’s existence but inexplicably repurposed only a small portion of the approximately 1,584-word text. One wonders why. It may have been too long to supersede what distant editors had already planned for their content in-press. It may not have fit within the Mormon agenda they had previously established in their paper (i.e., perhaps it was too positive or negative for their

⁵⁴⁰ James H. Eells, “For the New-York Evangelist,” *New York Evangelist*, April 9, 1836, 3; italics in original.

⁵⁴¹ Eells, 3; spelling, capitalization, and emphases in original; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*, chap. 1.

typical treatment). Or, perhaps, it simply was not good enough copy to capture their or their subscribers' attention.

Whatever the reason for ignoring or drastically reducing Eells's letter, the surviving extract in at least two Eastern papers reproduced only the peculiarity that "the Mormons are very eager to acquire an education. Men, women and children are studying Hebrew. Some of the men in middle age pursue their Hebrew till 12 o'clock at night and attend to nothing else."⁵⁴² Despite the slight commendation, the agenda still emphasized Mormon fanaticism, a characteristic not appreciated by Americans.

Agenda Setting Theory recognizes that editors' choices of what to print and what not to print as influenced by a myriad of forces comprises the agenda of what readers were intended to think about on a particular subject. Mr. Eells and the *New York Evangelist* provided the exchange with a smorgasbord of intelligence about Kirtland Mormonism and its prophet from which enterprising editors selected the sustenance specific to their purposes and the perceived appetites of their readers. What sustained one paper's interest, Smith's physical characteristics, for example, was simply a side dish to another's. Thus, journalism history becomes "a key to understanding the role of the press in the making of society."⁵⁴³

⁵⁴² "The Mormons," *Patriot and Democrat*, May 7, 1836, 2; see also "MARCH OF INTELLECT. The Mormons," *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 20, 1836, 1.

⁵⁴³ Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, "Introduction to Part One," in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9.

Duplicated or Different?

The loquacious and leveling assail of James Eells perforated the Mormon society in Kirtland with fresh denigrations. Similar to Mr. Eells's letter but strangely different because of its unusual mix of positive and negative assessments was another letter published in May 1836 in the *Ohio Atlas* (Elyria, OH) and republished in the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* that incriminated "the most ignorant, degraded and stupid set of beings on the face of the earth," who, at the same time, were "not wanting men of sagacity and ... strong powers of mind."⁵⁴⁴

Multiple instances of phraseology identical to that of Mr. Eells indicates the "new" letter was merely a modification of the old. However, the stark juxtaposition of compliments and castigation and peculiar vocabulary concerning the "Immortal Prophet" and the "huge, misshapen edifice" called a temple signify either inimitable editorial liberty in transcription, or an actual, separate letter.⁵⁴⁵ Nineteenth-century print culture includes the possibility that editors rewrote their agendas into a letter from an "anonymous" and duly concerned contributor to give the text greater credibility. Thus, an editor's agenda could be set before readers in any number of iterations to establish it in their minds.

For the Mormons, a third letter in 1836 bore another parallel imprint, but again, revealed enough distinctiveness to indicate it was an alternate text. This author disapproved that the sect had been "slandered, and belied, and persecuted beyond

⁵⁴⁴ "Mormonism," *Painesville Telegraph*, May 20, 1836, 1. The *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* stated it copied the letter from a nonextant issue of the Elyria *Ohio Atlas*.

⁵⁴⁵ "Mormonism," 1.

measure,” not only because of the violation of American liberties, but because it was unwise to do so— “persecution being the most effectual way to build up fanatics in error and delusion.”⁵⁴⁶

Whether separate sources or not, the antagonistic and forcefully written narrative spouted that the “43,000” Mormons were “likely to spread rapidly, for a season, especially where there is ignorance, combined with the law of the marvellous, and a mystical, distempered, and extravagant tone of piety.”⁵⁴⁷ The vilifying agendas used an exorbitant population statistic (the Mormons numbered about 1,200 in Kirtland in 1837) and the threat of the diabolical Mormon power of persuasion to elevate societal alarm. Although there is no means of discovering what subscriptions Mormons had for local papers, the American penchant for reading newspapers and the established fact that they regularly held subscriptions to multiple papers strongly indicates the Mormons were well aware of these letters printed within fifty miles of Kirtland.

Elongated Letters

The modest four-state coverage of the previous letter(s) was eclipsed by another epistle circulated through the exchange in July 1836 and copied and reprinted through no fewer than fourteen papers in seven states by October of the same year. The mammoth 563-line text was the fifth largest article since Smith discovered the plates, the equivalent of approximately twenty-one modern double-spaced pages. First published under the headline “More of Imposture,” the article was so large that many of the replicating

⁵⁴⁶ “Mormonism,” August 11, 1836, 1.

⁵⁴⁷ “Mormonism,” May 20, 1836, 1; spelling in original.

newspapers could not afford the column space for a complete transcription. It was, however, a windfall of text from which to extract and shape whatever details about Smith and the Mormons that supported editors' vilifying agendas.

"The opposition which is again kindling into active excitement against [the Mormons]—have brought them once more before the public, and furnished a fitting occasion for the following article," explained the introductory. Yet, so broad were the subjects and so dramatically did the correspondent vary between near admiration and excoriation that the *New York Spectator* felt the necessity to absolve itself from the claims of its correspondent: "We take leave to protest *totis viribus* against his latitudinarian comparisons, and his scarcely veiled insinuations."⁵⁴⁸ More particularly, the editors were careful to "also dissent from his views of the wrongs and injuries sustained by the Mormons and their claims to sympathy as men persecuted for opinion's sake. They have *not* been more sinned against than sinning."⁵⁴⁹

The July 1836 article, written in a first-person, skillful journalistic style, began with an atypical mournful tale of the plight of the Mormons. The reader is drawn in with a larger scope, a ponderous recitation of the founding of the country, extolled as the

⁵⁴⁸ "With all one's might." "Totis Viribus," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017). "Characterized by latitude in opinion or action, especially in matters of religion; tolerating free thought or laxity of belief on religious questions." "Latitudinarian," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Historian Daniel Walker Howe observed of the nineteenth century that "the use of Latin marked one as educated and gave weight to one's arguments." Physicians wrote their prescriptions in Latin and lawyers (and as can be seen, newspapermen) sprinkled their arguments with Latin. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, 462.

⁵⁴⁹ "More of Imposture," *New York Spectator*, July 28, 1836; spelling and emphases in original.

asylum of religious liberty, and the author's figurative joining with his whole heart and soul with Americans in singing hymns of praise in honor of the liberties they enjoyed. Brave Pilgrim ancestors were eulogized for forsaking their comfortable, civilized abodes and establishing religious freedoms for themselves, but, more importantly, that "they should found an empire which would secure the same blessings to their posterity for ages to come."⁵⁵⁰ The narrative crescendoed with the inconceivable violation of these American virtues in many instances where the minority "are permitted to exercise their faith and perform their acts of devotion, only so long as they continue in accordance with public opinion, and escape the notice of the ignorant and prejudiced mob." Foremost among such were the Mormons, "an inoffensive people, who have been driven *vi et armis* from their houses and lands"⁵⁵¹ and against whom a war had been waged.⁵⁵²

Having gone into Jackson County, Missouri, "like other well-disposed citizens of this free and happy country" to lay the foundation of a city called Zion, their enthusiasm and extravagant pretensions and the zeal of their preachers soon excited an intolerant spirit in their neighbors. The citizens met and resolved that the Mormons "should be expelled. An attack was accordingly made upon them, the printing press destroyed, the Lord's Store-House closed, and, as report goes, several of the leaders were decked out in extra suits of tar and feathers." The pitiable prose proceeded with the "whipping [of] their

⁵⁵⁰ Habitation Montium, "Mormonism," *New York Spectator*, July 28, 1836.

⁵⁵¹ "With force and arms." "Vi et Armis," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁵² Montium, "Mormonism."

wives, and cutting off the ears of their children” while in retreat.⁵⁵³ Mormon readers were likely ecstatic at the masterful and poetic depiction and continued their reading with anticipation of further solidified sympathy. The writer was only a quarter into his digest.

The correspondent, apparently dedicated to a pro-Mormon purpose, then casually remarked: “It appears that Mormonism owes its origin to an individual named Solomon Spalding.” The remaining three fourths of the gargantuan article is primarily an extraction of E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled* and was as adept at dismantling Mormonism as it was defending it. The text was laced with the familiar agenda of stressing Smith’s dishonesty by discrediting Smith’s authorship of the “Mormon Bible,” debasing the Smith family who were “remarkable only for being lazy, ignorant and superstitious,” discountenancing Smith’s familial witnesses of the gold plates, doubting the Mormon gift of tongues, and denouncing Smith’s revelations.⁵⁵⁴

Intermingled with the disparagement was laudatory language that Smith, “although ignorant, ... possessed strong natural powers of mind, an inventive genius, easy address, fascinating manners, a mild and sober exterior, and was withal an excellent judge of human feelings and passions.” Thus, Mormonism was “successfully introduced and spread like wildfire.” Then, in an apparent effort to balance the positive assessment, the tone reassumed its agenda of portraying a reckless, absurd, fanatical Mormon. The excitable converts, upon reception of the Holy Ghost, were prone “to scenes of the most wild, frantic, horrible fanaticism,” including prostrating themselves “mind and body [on the floor,] lifeless for a long time,” or “taken with fits of rolling about, making ridiculous

⁵⁵³ Montium; spelling, capitalization, and emphases in original.

⁵⁵⁴ Montium.

grimaces and contortions of the body, creeping up on their hands and feet, and exhibiting the various feats of Indian warfare, such as knocking down, scalping, ripping open, and tearing out the bowels” of imaginary phantoms. Young Mormon men “were seen, even at midnight, running through the fields in pursuit of lights and balls of fire, which they saw floating in the atmosphere.”⁵⁵⁵

Ultimately, of the honest and industrious people, the correspondent, Habitor Montium,⁵⁵⁶ resolved: “But after all, I don’t know that we have anything to fear from their increase. The unkind expressions indulged in by newspaper editors, and the intolerant spirit excited against them, appear to me not only uncharitable but undeserved.”⁵⁵⁷ Whatever his relationship with the newspaper world, the writer’s deductions show that editors throughout the country had efficiently set the agenda of what was being thought and believed about the Mormons. The tome finally closed with a liberal thought most editors and readers were unwilling to allow: so long as the Mormons conducted themselves as good citizens,

they are not only entitled to the protection of the laws but to our respect. If they are weak enough to believe that the moon is made of green cheese, or that Joe Smith is the channel through which the deity makes known his laws to his creatures, it is a matter of their own concern, and of little importance to society.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁵ Montium.

⁵⁵⁶ This is apparently the contributor’s pseudonym. It is possible its Latin connotation is “mountain dweller.” The writer’s existence as a journalist is verified by a lengthy column with a similar writing style found in an 1835 *Army and Navy Chronicle*, which was rebutted in the same paper the following month. See Habitor Montium, “The West Point Hotel,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, October 29, 1835, 349; W., “Highlands and ‘Highlanders.,’” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, November 19, 1835, 372–73.

⁵⁵⁷ Montium, “Mormonism;” spelling modernized for readability.

⁵⁵⁸ Montium.

The libertarian reasoning was sound but its practical application to those neighboring the corporeal Mormons was inexplicably *not*. A subjective ideology was less idyllic when incorporated into a body of fanatical, destitute, and growing people capable of swaying politics and economics. Editors felt duty bound to the agenda of warning Americans of the reality of the Mormon population while cautiously ignoring Constitutional liberties that justified the swelling Mormon tide.

Exchange editors carefully mined Montium's text and excluded the hands-off philosophy to suit their agendas. Each reprint reproduced lengthy excerpts concerning Solomon Spaulding and Smith's debauched character, while none of the extant exchange papers included the sympathetic tones.⁵⁵⁹ Of the original 563 lines, some of the succeeding papers reprinted as many as 340 lines but with the intentional abandonment of the favorable assessments. Editors were proficient and unabashedly availed themselves of what they felt were the most usable portions of what the *New York Spectator* described as "a large store of curious if not valuable information, on the subject of great and increasing interest."⁵⁶⁰ Most appended their own jeers to the article while recognizing the skillful source—as summarized by an August 1836 *Boston Courier*: "We do not recollect to have seen [the Mormon subject] put together in so readable a form."⁵⁶¹ Despite its textual girth and replication, the Mormons made no mention of it in their newspaper.

⁵⁵⁹ See, for example, "Mormonism," *Essex Gazette*, August 20, 1836, 1; "History of Mormanism," *Ohio Repository*, September 1, 1836, 2; spelling in title in original; "Mormonism—Its History," *Daily Commercial Bulletin and Missouri Literary Register*, September 9, 1836; "History of Mormonism," *The Aurora*, September 24, 1836.

⁵⁶⁰ "More of Imposture," col. a.

⁵⁶¹ "Mormonism," *Boston Courier*, August 25, 1836, 1.

Montium's letter concluded with the standard non-Mormon agenda of credulity and gullibility expressed in his surprise at the rising numbers of foolish followers. "A more fallacious absurdity was never started," the Washington City *United States Telegraph* added; "more illiterate or worthless leaders never took upon themselves the character of prophets. And yet strange as it may seem, Mormonism is on the increase!"⁵⁶² However, the correspondent's overall examination was sufficiently thorough to cause the September 2, 1836, *Boston Investigator* to assert that "poor 'Jo' must now consent to relinquish the idea of that glorious immortality which he no doubt thought posterity would confer upon him."⁵⁶³

Less than a decade after Mormonism's inception, editors' agendas had made the Mormon persona intolerable, perpetuated by the press of letters. Seminal journalism historian James Carey averred that "the solid facts of society are the imaginations men have of one another."⁵⁶⁴ Editors carefully crafted and dispatched a desired imagination of the Mormons into the public sphere with remarkable prowess. Each successive editor from New England to the frontier bent the imagination to their own agendas further ingrainning a contrived set of what they considered to be incontrovertible facts into the mindset of American readers. Agenda-Setting theorist Maxwell McCombs had no doubts that "journalists do significantly influence their audience's picture of the world."⁵⁶⁵ For Mormonism, this was no truer than in the kinetic energy of a few unprecedented letters in

⁵⁶² "MORMONISM—IMPOSTURE," *United States Telegraph*, August 10, 1836.

⁵⁶³ "Origin of the Mormon Bible," *Boston Investigator*, September 2, 1836.

⁵⁶⁴ Carey, "The Problem of Journalism History," Spring 1974, 4.

⁵⁶⁵ McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*, 19.

1836.

Mormon Printing in 1836

“God will soon begin to manifest his sore displeasure to this generation, and to our own country, by vexation and desolating wars; bloody! bloody in the extreme!” the July 1836 Mormon *Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, OH) warned. The text was taken from the growing number of Mormon pamphlets written and distributed by distant prominent Mormon missionaries. Printed on non-Mormon presses, they helped to broaden the reach of the four Mormon agendas, in this case the distribution of Mormon doctrine. The printing and reprinting of such tracts in Ohio, the Northeast, and as far as Toronto, Canada, and London, England, extended a limited vocal sermon “that many may be put in possession of this information whose circumstances are such that they do not obtain it by public preaching.”⁵⁶⁶

The Mormons by 1836 were mastering the power of printed agendas akin to companion religions of the day. The American Unitarian Association described the interposition of heaven and earth by means of the press in this way: God provided the efficient instrument to disperse the word of salvation, the “wonderful engine [of] the press ... formed to echo with a thousand repetitions, every voice that is uttered in the pulpit, and capable of sending the truth into a thousand places which the uttered voice never reaches.”⁵⁶⁷ Sacred was the duty of promoting Christianity by the circulation of the

⁵⁶⁶ O. Hyde, “A Prophetic Warning,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, July 1836, 342–46; spelling and capitalization in original. The *Messenger and Advocate* printing was an extract from Hyde’s original tract.

⁵⁶⁷ Henry Ware, Jr., *The Duty of Promoting Christianity by the Circulation of Books*, 1st Series (Boston, MA: American Unitarian Association, 1838), 10.

printed word. Nonetheless, its use by Mormon “fanatics [who] feel flattered with the notion of being the peculiar favorites of heaven, and having the divine influence sensibly vouchsafed and under their control,” was intolerable in September 1836 to the Hudson *Ohio Observer*, thirty-six miles south of Kirtland. This individual, the paper pointed at the Mormon writer, who “stakes his reputation as a true prophet” on the fulfillment that “flies shall go forth among the people, and bite them and cause worms to come in their flesh, and their flesh shall fall from their bones; and their eyes shall fall out of their socket; and they shall desire to die, and their desire shall not be granted,” proved the Mormons to be full of “folly and absurdity” led by the “imposter ... Joe Smith.”⁵⁶⁸

The non-Mormon press used such ludicrous Mormon claims to set the image of an inane faith creeping slowly through the country in a limited number of printed texts, but which could not be ignored. On the other hand, Mormon printers were convinced that their agenda was “deserving of a wider circulation.” The *Observer*’s discontent shows the Mormon agenda was having an effect at least locally and it was earnestly hoped that it would be “only a prelude to what is more lucid and convincing ... in dispelling the mists of ignorance and moral darkness that have long brooded over the human mind.”⁵⁶⁹

The year 1836 had only 137 articles about Mormons printed in it, the second-lowest printed interest in the seven-year stay in Kirtland. Moreover, 1836 contained the lowest percentage of explicitly critical articles, 24 percent. The Mormon agenda of

⁵⁶⁸ “The Mormons,” September 8, 1836, 98. The text of primary concern to the Hudson *Ohio Observer*, and which is cited here, is not found in the extract of the *Messenger and Advocate*—indicating that the Ohio newspaper had access to the original tract.

⁵⁶⁹ *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, July 1836, 346–47.

correcting misconceptions by responding in print to outside articles in 1836 regularized, rebutting no fewer than eleven stinging observations of their not-so-fellow newspapermen.

1837: The Collapse of Kirtland

Mentions of Mormonism in newspapers of 1837 increased 21 percent from the previous year with a 31 percent upsurge of critical editorials. Two Mormon topics dominated the printed landscape with no fewer than 106 articles—more than two thirds of the 1837 total—namely, the failed Mormon banking scheme, and Smith’s reported hired murder of a Kirtland businessman who was intolerant of the Mormon presence.

The Mormon Anti-Banking Society

The national banking fever was at a pitch in 1837 and the tug-of-war of politics large and small over a national bank was a regular feature in the press.⁵⁷⁰ Newspapers in Ohio were reporting that banks and the banking system were “the all-engrossing subject of the times.” The 1837 presidential election put the anti-bank Martin Van Buren in the White House who, according to the Cleveland, Ohio, *Daily Herald and Gazette* was “pledged to carry out the principles of the Second Grand Declaration of Independence, which declares the Government to be free and independent of the People, not subject to their will nor laws.” The *Herald and Gazette* remarked without explanation that local and

⁵⁷⁰ The editor of the Cleveland, Ohio, *Daily Herald and Gazette* was particularly preoccupied with the subject; his editorials were blatantly anti-Van Buren, opposed to the “Vanocrats,” and in favor of a national bank. See, for example, “A Dilemma,” *Daily Herald and Gazette*, September 8, 1837; “Anti-Bank,” *Daily Herald and Gazette*, September 4, 1837; “Mr. Van Buren’s Opinions,” *Daily Herald and Gazette*, August 22, 1837. The scope of his preoccupation included the Mormon banking efforts on which he penned thirteen articles cited in this chapter as appropriate.

national financial arguments embarrassed and perplexed Ohio citizens “as much, if not more, than any other subject [being] agitated.”⁵⁷¹ In the wake of former president Andrew Jackson’s demolition of the Bank of the United States, whose charter ended in 1836, applications for private banks flooded state legislatures. One Ohio politician, “although it was under some embarrassment of feelings,” submitted a petition signed by numerous Mormons of his represented county asking for a bank charter.⁵⁷² Such enterprises had the potential to enliven a state’s commerce,⁵⁷³ or provide fodder against aspiring politicians for granting charters that bankrupted localized communities.⁵⁷⁴

The Mormons entered the financial fray by proposing their own bank for a number of reasons, not the least of which were the dire straits posed by the exorbitant cost of building the temple. The *Cleveland Weekly Advertiser* announced on December 29, 1836, that it had “received the Constitution of the ‘Kirtland Safety Society Bank’ [that] will go into operation immediately; the plates for bills being soon expected from Philadelphia.”⁵⁷⁵ The American press response to the latest Mormon venture had not

⁵⁷¹ “BANKS, AND THE BANKING SYSTEM,” *Daily Herald and Gazette*, August 22, 1837; capitalization in original.

⁵⁷² “In Senate,” *Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette*, February 14, 1837, 2.

⁵⁷³ See Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts*, 193–94.

⁵⁷⁴ For example, the honorable E. W. Hubbard of the Ohio House of Representatives was castigated for voting for the creation of “some 20 or 30 ‘irresponsible banks’”—a key evidence used against “irresponsible [political] monsters.” “Note These Facts,” *Daily Herald and Gazette*, September 7, 1837.

⁵⁷⁵ “Bank at Kirtland,” *Cleveland Weekly Advertiser*, December 29, 1836, 1. In the national turmoil over a central bank with a standardized paper currency, state governments were inundated with petitions for private banks, which were chartered to print and exchange their own bills. This imposed significant limitations on the paper notes that were likely unfamiliar and untrustworthy to other banks or businesses at any distance from its origin. The situation opened possibilities for counterfeiters and

taken long; the minutes of the meeting of the new stockholders were printed in a *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* Extra only weeks earlier in November.⁵⁷⁶ Six additional papers noted the enterprise and queried, “Who can tell what the end of Mormonism will be?”⁵⁷⁷ There appeared to be no limit to the audacity of Mormon leaders. However, editors were quick to set the implications of a Mormon bank throughout the region and it did not take much in the precarious national financial situation to cause agitation. Unbeknownst to the bank’s founders, its acute, surreptitious failure in early 1837 was to be a contributing factor to Smith and ultimately the entire body of Mormons having to flee Kirtland permanently.

The matter of the Mormon bank was found in an unprecedented eighty-six articles in twelve states (of twenty-six in the union), twenty-two cities, and in twenty-nine newspapers from December 1836 to December 1837. The issue was absent from the press only two months of the year.⁵⁷⁸ Coverage was almost exclusively Northern, though two Southern papers, the *Macon Georgia Telegraph* and the *Georgia Messenger* 810 miles

frustrated the honest. For a contemporary account of the arguments over the best manner to provide Americans with a “uniform and sound currency,” see William Beach Lawrence, *The Bank of the United States* (Boston, MA: W. L. Lewis, 1831), 4. For additional context of the Mormon banking effort, see Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations*, chaps. 32–34.

⁵⁷⁶ See “Mormon Bank,” *Ohio Repository*, December 29, 1836, 2; see also Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, 1:65–66.

⁵⁷⁷ “Mormonism in Ohio,” *New York Evangelist*, December 17, 1836, 3; see also “Mormonism in Ohio,” *The Aurora*, January 19, 1837, 3; “Mormonism in Ohio,” *Yankee Farmer and Portland Newsletter*, February 4, 1837, 38; “Mormonism in Ohio,” *Macon Georgia Telegraph*, April 27, 1837, 1.

⁵⁷⁸ This two-month gap is more than likely to be filled as additional newspapers are digitized and electronic search capabilities improve to locate such topics.

south of Kirtland, were among the exchange papers privy to the financial floundering of the Mormon monetary system. Ohio editors contributed fifty-five of the articles in fourteen different papers. The topic was also the source of a readily prevalent argument between editors of the Mormon-friendly *Cleveland Advertiser* and the skeptical *Cleveland Daily Gazette*—the first of such interchanges on Mormonism between non-Mormon papers. The amount of news coverage on this issue exceeded any one given topic in the history of Mormonism. Editors had found their principal agenda for 1837, Mormon criminality, the exploitation of which shaped perceptions of Mormons in nearly half of the country. Those with vilifying agendas found ready characteristics of Mormon involvement in secular finances to cast a diabolical enemy.

The Bank Struggled to Begin

Mormon confidence in obtaining the charter is evident in having plates for their paper notes struck at the same time the charter was in debate⁵⁷⁹—as opposed to waiting for legal endorsement before committing themselves to a die not easily modified or inexpensively recast. Their position was tenable for reason of “their wealth, their numbers, and from the deficiency of banking facilities in [that] quarter of [the] State.” Nevertheless, the printing plates arrived but the charter did not. Even a second attempt for a charter was struck down in the Ohio Senate with eleven yeas and twenty-four nays. It was a detail that six exchange papers fastened to the understandings of Ohio citizens from February to July 1837 to exhibit an antiauthoritarian attitude within Mormonism that

⁵⁷⁹ See Dale W. Adams, “Chartering the Kirtland Bank,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 4 (1983): 1–15.

slyly sidestepped the denial of the appropriate permissions.⁵⁸⁰

The *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, OH) of March 1837 printed the minutes of a reorganized Kirtland Safety Society, in which the previous constitution was unanimously annulled and during which a private joint stock company was created instead.⁵⁸¹ Observers were quickly unconvinced and doubted whether the creators had “ever applied for a charter.”⁵⁸² Far more alarming was the possibility that there was “no property bound for their redemption, [nor] coin on hand” to redeem the “emission of bills from the society of Mormons,” a warning that there was insufficient specie in the Mormon coffers to guarantee the circulating bills. Such methods, the papers shouted, were “a most reprehensible fraud on the public.”⁵⁸³

Censorious editors were keen to expose another element to their readers to vilify Mormon deviousness. A careful inspection of the paper bills revealed a damning detail. The letters engraved on the bills appeared to the unsuspecting to read like a typical bank bill. But,

on scrutiny it will be found that previous to the word “Bank” in capitals, the word “anti” in small letters is inserted, and after the word “Bank,” the syllable “ing” is

⁵⁸⁰ “In Senate,” February 14, 1837, 2; see also “Legislature,” *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, February 18, 1837, 2; *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, February 20, 1837, 2; “In Senate,” *Ohio Observer*, July 2, 1837, 2.

⁵⁸¹ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Members of the ‘Kirtland Safety Society,’ Held on the 2d Day of January, 1837,” *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, March 1837, 475–77. See Jeffrey N. Walker, “The Kirtland Safety Society and the Fraud of Grandison Newell: A Legal Examination,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2015): 44–48.

⁵⁸² “Mormon Bank,” 2.

⁵⁸³ “A New Revelation—Morman [Sic] Money,” *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, January 12, 1837, 2.

affixed in small letters also, so as to read in fact, instead of Bank,
“ANTIBANKING.”⁵⁸⁴

The fact that the majority of the bills were not stamped in this way⁵⁸⁵ indicates that editors were careful in the selection of evidences to support their agendas, particularly Mormon vilification. Thus, editors presented to the public eye a deceptive Mormon manipulation of plates, modified after-the-fact, to promptly discredit the venture and its associated people.

However, a typographical error in the discrediting article’s replication, whether inadvertent or intentional, served to further degrade Mormon intent. The apparent authors of the article, the *Cleveland Daily Gazette* and its sibling the *Cleveland Weekly Gazette*, titled the column “A NEW REVELATION.” Twelve days later, the *Huron Reflector* (Norwalk, OH) entitled its reprint, “*A new revolution*.”⁵⁸⁶ Thus, the interrelated vilifying

⁵⁸⁴ “A New Revelation—Morman [Sic] Money,” 2; spelling and emphases in original. Four additional papers in the exchange simplified the explanation but included a quotation directly from the bill that named “J. Smith” as Treasurer. Furthermore, they perpetuated the association with the new, and in these papers, disliked, President: “This, we suppose, is the *real* Van Buren currency, and is intended to take the place of the ‘crag’s of monster.” “The Mormon Money,” *Richmond Palladium*, February 18, 1837, 2; italics in original; see also “THE MORMON MONEY,” *Alton Telegraph*, February 22, 1837, 3.

⁵⁸⁵ In actuality, only the three dollar bill was stamped with the “Anti-Banking Co.” adaptation. See Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland: Eyewitness Accounts*, 197. See also Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations*, 479.

⁵⁸⁶ “A New Revolution.—Mormon Money,” *Huron Reflector*, January 24, 1837, 3; italics in original. The irony of the spelling mistake, if it was not intentional, is the misspelling of *Morman* in the original *Cleveland Daily Gazette* text, which was corrected in the *Huron Reflector* (Norwalk, OH) next to the newly incorrect title that changed *revelation* to *revolution*. Reprints of the article in additional newspapers replicated a corrected version of the original title; nevertheless, at least one paper reprinted the modified title with the substituted “Revolution.” See, for example, “A New Revolution—Mormon Money,” *Painesville Telegraph*, January 20, 1837.

agendas of unmasking Mormonism's dishonesty and criminality applied to its paper money, Smith's fallibility as a prophet, and his diabolical aims to fleece honorable but financially unsuspecting Americans. No fewer than six newspapers found and perpetuated the Mormon underhandedness in Ohio, Connecticut, Michigan, and Massachusetts.⁵⁸⁷

Arguing over Mormonism

The debate between the *Cleveland Weekly Advertiser* and the *Cleveland Daily Gazette* erupted immediately in January 1837. The *Advertiser* accused the *Gazette* of maltreating the Mormons to which the *Gazette* asserted to feel no "hostility to the project [the Mormon bank], provided [they] could feel that it is safe. Of this there is no evidence." The *Gazette* maintained that "we have nothing against the Mormons, or their religion," but then spent the next third of the article in sarcastic tones ridiculing the Book of Mormon and calling into question the testimony of Smith's handpicked witnesses who were permitted to see the gold plates.⁵⁸⁸ The *Gazette* had turned the argument from the anti-banking institution to ridiculing the *Advertiser*'s obvious belief in "the Mormon Mohammed [Smith]" and his converted Campbellite associate, Sidney Rigdon, "a notorious hypocrite and knave." The more likely revelation, it pronounced, was that "Joe

⁵⁸⁷ See, for example, "New Revelation.—Mormon Money," *Connecticut Courant*, February 4, 1837, 2; "Mormon Money," *Boston Courier*, February 6, 1837; "A New Revelation.—Mormon Money," *Constantine Republican*, February 8, 1837, 1. The editor of the *Cleveland Daily Gazette* original article included a jab against the state of Michigan in the last line of the column. The Michigan *Constantine Republican* reprinted the article verbatim but excluded the sarcastic lines without explanation or retort.

⁵⁸⁸ This is a reference to the "Testimony" of three and eight witnesses who saw Smith's gold plates and whose affidavit was appended to the 1830 Book of Mormon.

Smith should take up what little money they have and depart hence.” The *Gazette*’s concern was for “the laborer who holds a dollar or two of the ‘KIRTLAND SAFETY SOCIETY anti BANKing Company’s bills” when the inevitable “evil will fall.”⁵⁸⁹

The *Advertiser* lashed back the following day with two different articles totaling 251 lines with an apology for devoting so much attention to the subject. The rebuttal of the front page was professional and evidence-laden, including a reprint of the January 1837 Kirtland Safety Society meeting minutes and its sixteen Articles of Agreement. However, on page three, the *Gazette*’s arguments were blasted with outright sarcasm for deflecting the real issue and stooping to vacuous claims against the religion. Of the charge that the Mormons had insufficient specie for the redemption of its notes, the *Advertiser* reminded readers that “nearly all the real estate in Kirtland, together with extensive water power, belongs to members of the Society [primarily Mormons]; that there are among them many men of wealth and enterprise.” Then, with surprising apologetic tones, the *Advertiser* explained “that in their dealings here and elsewhere, they have shown themselves as honest and able to meet obligations as those of different religious opinions.”⁵⁹⁰

The editor of the *Gazette* was then challenged to

take the trouble of gathering up some of the bills he mentions, and carrying them to Kirtland, to be exchanged for gold, silver, or other banknotes; and if whilst there, he will take notice of the activity and thrift of the place, its rapid increase in population and wealth, and the evidence of real property ... we are satisfied he

⁵⁸⁹ “Mormon Money,” *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, January 17, 1837, 2; emphases in original but spelling modernized; see also “Mormon Money,” *Cleveland Weekly Gazette*, January 18, 1837, 3.

⁵⁹⁰ “Kirtland Safety Society,” *Cleveland Weekly Advertiser*, January 19, 1837, 3; capitalization in original.

will return lightened of a load of prejudice.⁵⁹¹

The *Gazette* responded, again, the very next day—indicating that the editors worked feverishly to obtain a copy of the opposition paper, compose its response, and set it to type in time for the next day’s paper. “It is not possible for us to be neutral,” the *Gazette* rejoined.⁵⁹²

Amid the battle between papers to trump the other’s assertions, which has not been found to have been duplicated in the exchange, was the first indication that the notes were immediately destined to be distrusted. “Circulated among us as money or bills of exchange,” the *Painesville (OH) Republican* read, “they do not, as yet obtain a general currency. [And,] not being received at the Bank in this place, those who are doing business with the bank, will not of course, take them.” The editorial lamented the desperate Ohio need for a means of fluid exchange for property-bound credit and chastised the legislature for its “palpable abridgment” of constitutional rights guaranteed even to Mormon business ventures but which they squashed. To affirm the credibility of the Mormon currency, the *Republican* likewise reprinted the Articles of Agreement and encouraged the Mormons to “inform the public through the public prints and over the signature of some number of individuals, in whom the public would place confidence, of the amount of specie which they have on hand, showing their ability to redeem their bills.”⁵⁹³ The 275-line text added to the snowballing attention not even a month old.

⁵⁹¹ “Kirtland Safety Society,” 3; capitalization and emphasis in original.

⁵⁹² “Mormon Currency,” *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, January 20, 1837, 2.

⁵⁹³ “Anti-Banking Company,” *Painesville Republican*, January 19, 1837, 2. For additional concern about the unavailability of paper money or the ability to liquidate assets, with a brief mention to the possibility of the Mormon system, see “The Currency,”

The *Gazette*'s daily correspondence on the matter continued and, in a surprising shift in direction on January 23, 1837, the distrusting editor acceded the larger need for currency despite the Mormon association: "This paper, in conjunction with the Advertiser, is *now pledged* in support of the Mormon money." Notwithstanding the desire to set the course for their newspaper, editors faced very practical self-serving concerns for their own survival. With palpable averseness, the editor of the *Gazette* sided with the greater good, though he remained perched with ready talons at the first indication at the bills' failure to be redeemed.⁵⁹⁴ He did not have to wait long. Twenty-four hours later, with an obvious note of glibness, the *Gazette* announced to the *Advertiser* and the *Herald*: "We promised yesterday to give neighbor Herald the first intelligence, in case his 'pet' anti-BANK should get tired of redeeming their bills. It happened yesterday."⁵⁹⁵ Additional papers verified the truth of the collapse of the "*Revelation of the Mormon Prophet*" with laborious emphases: "*How have the Mighty Fallen!!*"⁵⁹⁶ Both non-Mormon and Mormon editors next preoccupied themselves with whom to blame.

Daily Herald and Gazette, April 24, 1837.

⁵⁹⁴ "Law versus Mobocracy," *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, January 23, 1837, 2; italics in original.

⁵⁹⁵ "A Piece of News for the Herald," *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, January 24, 1837, 2; capitalization in original.

⁵⁹⁶ "How Have the Mighty Fallen!!," *Western Reserve Chronicle*, February 7, 1837, 3; emphases, capitalization, and spelling in original. The article was reprinted from the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* of the same date.

Searching for a Scapegoat

The printed discourses provide a traceable indicator of the looming storm that was brewing against the Mormon business. With a Mormon population of 1,800 in Kirtland,⁵⁹⁷ and considering the American proclivity for newspapers and multiple subscriptions typically held by each household, Kirtland citizens were well-informed of the disintegrating public opinion that was gathering momentum against the “phantom money”⁵⁹⁸ and those affiliated with it. Soon, even Mormons with billfolds full of Mormon bills went hungry, unable to spend them.⁵⁹⁹ Who or what was to blame? Some papers sided with interpretations of the Act of 1816, an Ohio law that declared “all notes, bonds, &c. issued by unauthorized banking companies null and void,” while at the same time other papers pronounced the 1816 law “obsolete and inoperative.” If the Mormon financial system violated Ohio law, editors had a powerful piece to set before their readers to further sketch the face of Mormon criminality and villainy. It also opened a lucrative door for some who thought to capitalize on the possible illegality by bringing its perpetrators to court and collecting a reward.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁷ See Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-Day Saints in Ohio 1830-1838*, 140.

⁵⁹⁸ “Mormon Money Once More,” *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, January 25, 1837.

⁵⁹⁹ See Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 2007, 331.

⁶⁰⁰ “For the Republican,” *Painesville Republican*, February 16, 1837, 2–3. If the Act of 1816 was still in force, an “informer” could receive 50 percent of the recovery of an action against violators, providing a profitable allurements for potential or real antagonists of Smith and his followers. For a legal examination of applicable Ohio laws at the time of the Kirtland Safety Society, see Walker, “The Kirtland Safety Society and the Fraud of Grandison Newell: A Legal Examination,” 61–66. For examples of such litigation against Smith and others, see Gordon A. Madsen, Jeffrey N. Walker, and John W. Welch, eds., *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith’s Legal Encounters* (Provo, UT: BYU

Mormons voiced their agenda to offset a disadvantageous perception of themselves in January in that “the public have misused us, by refusing to circulate our bills.”⁶⁰¹ And, the unstable national economy Van Buren inherited was beginning to dissolve as Southern cotton brokers, New York City creditors, and even the Tappan brothers, New York publishers of the *Journal of Commerce* and philanthropic backers of the *Colored American*, went bankrupt. The Kirtland Safety Society was caught in a vortex greater than the comprehension of the Mormons or the American editors who were verbally shredding their bank notes. The Panic of 1837 that continued to sink further into national financial depression during the next couple of years was, according to American historian Jessica Lepler, in reality, “the many panics of 1837.”⁶⁰² Aware or not of the larger economic implications, editors were satisfied to extract the fragments of the Mormon failure best suited to support the agendas they desired to place before the public.

In addition to the first instance of a daily argument between non-Mormon papers over the Mormons, the collapse of the Mormon institution was also the occasion of one newspaper, the *Advertiser*, accusing another, the *Gazette*, of causing the Mormon failure. The *Advertiser* scolded the *Gazette* for its vacillation and its obvious empty and short-lived claim of support. “Our brother of the *Gazette* labors against this institution with the zeal of a prophet intent on verifying his own predictions,” it indicted. The *Advertiser*’s

Studies, 2014), chaps. 9–10.

⁶⁰¹ “Mormon Money Once More.”

⁶⁰² See Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); see also Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848*, 501–8.

sympathetic tone was clear: the Mormons were “a class of our fellow citizens whom we believed to be most shamefully and cruelly persecuted; whose motives and intentions were totally misconstrued and misrepresented.”⁶⁰³ It was an interesting twist where attention was deflected away from the evil Mormon prophet to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the *Gazette*’s editor.

However, the *Advertiser* could not escape what now appeared to be its foolish support of the Society. Its early February 1837 issue began with a fifty-five-line self-defense, assuring readers that it had since painstakingly ascertained the facts. The *Advertiser* maintained that Mormon specie was sufficient but the unscrupulous *Gazette* had a calculated plan to topple the Mormon system. By stating the Mormon bank had failed when it had not, the *Gazette* created the necessary hostility, a means of vilification, to cause “the assembling of a furious and insulting mob, who threatened the destruction of the building and compelled the officers to close the doors in self-defense.” Thus, the *Gazette* was responsible for crafting a panic that caused a panic. Their actions, the *Advertiser* accused, “have manifested the most deadly hostility to the citizens of Kirtland, ... which have greatly deceived their readers and affected no good whatever.”⁶⁰⁴ The following day, February 3, 1837, the *Gazette* laughed at the charges that cautioning the public was what caused the alarm.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰³ “Kirtland Society,” *Cleveland Weekly Advertiser*, January 26, 1837, 2.

⁶⁰⁴ “Kirtland Safety Society,” 3.

⁶⁰⁵ See “Ignorance,” *Cleveland Daily Gazette*, February 3, 1837, 2.

Mormon Financial and Moral Ruin

Editors revisited a new angle of the agenda of Mormon dishonesty in their multifaceted attack on Smith and his expanding organization: greed. Observers saw and editors spread reports of a growing Mormon lust for land. S. A. Davis, the editor of the *Glad Tidings and Ohio Christian Telescope*, published simultaneously in Columbus, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, made a visit to Kirtland in the spring of 1837. It was he who published the generally favorable assessment of Smith described at the beginning of this chapter and to whom the Mormon printers extended gratitude in their paper. Though his estimation of the Mormons was professionally polite, he doubted that the purpose of Mormon gathering, as they declared, was a sign that the glorious millennium was at hand—a conclusion caused by their obvious pecuniary pride. Mr. Davis dictated:

There is one circumstance that augurs rather unfavorably for such a conclusion. That is, they seem to have too much worldly wisdom connected with their religion—too great a desire for the perishable riches of this world—holding out the idea that the kingdom of Christ is to be composed of “real estate, herds, flocks, silver, gold,” &c. as well as of human things.⁶⁰⁶

The April 1837 *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* took issue with the appraisal as part of their agenda to correct the warped image created in the agendas of hostile editors. They regretted that there was “an undue attachment in some of the saints to amass wealth and heap up perishable treasure. We have only to say, we deprecate such a propensity.” The offense at the allegation and concern for the sin was naïvely or purposefully negligible because, after praising Mr. Davis and his associates as “gentlemen of liberal minds [and] of correct republican principles,” the *Messenger and*

⁶⁰⁶ Davis, “Kirtland,--Mormonism, &c.,” 263. *Augur* is to prognosticate from signs or omens; to divine, forebode, or anticipate. “Augur,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Advocate reprinted all 140 lines of Mr. Davis's description, including the derogatory statements.⁶⁰⁷

The spiritual valuation, nevertheless, was not amiss. Lay members and key Mormon figures alike were swept up in the frontier craze of inflating land prices as new settlers poured in intending to purchase property. The depth of Mormon despair, sunk in this unrestrained land speculation, took a terrible moral toll during these days. The Hudson *Ohio Observer* printed in February 1837 a rare, almost mournful, reflection from a non-Mormon Kirtland citizen on the striking change among the Mormon neighbors. Not long ago, it recalled, they "lived in obscurity, in a few miserable shanties and log houses ... considered unworthy of public notice, and it was thought they would speedily come to nothing and sink into oblivion." Their concern and devotion was to miracles, healing, speaking in tongues, and prophecy, was the pensive sigh. "But, as we said, they have undergone a great change. For some time past they have been swelling up with pride and ambition." The love of money "completely infatuated these Mormons." Gone were the miracles, and "the desire of worldly gain has killed all their religion." The priests and apostles had "turned into a great company of bankers and land speculators."⁶⁰⁸ The contributor provided the *Observer* with an effective piece to cast an image of a greedy faith made compelling because of its personal, doleful prose.

Inflated egos and land prices could not and did not last. Many were left desolate after having invested everything in the stock.⁶⁰⁹ "The prostration of the bank was a sad

⁶⁰⁷ April 1837, 489–91.

⁶⁰⁸ C., "About Matters in Kirtland," *Ohio Observer*, March 2, 1837, 198.

⁶⁰⁹ Mormon leaders and editors were angered that the wealthy corrupt who caused

shock to many a poor Mormon,” the citizen explained. “They were much elated by the prospect of an abundance of money; and had been living on the bank in anticipation long before the bills came out.” Nevertheless, the honest writer also implicated himself, willing to admit the effects of the contagion of prosperity on non-Mormon neighbors:

This love of money is likely to be the root of some evils to us, as well as to them. We sold our property high, and some of us were much elated at the prospect of making our fortunes; and now we are placed under a strong temptation to pray for their prosperity, in order that we may be able to get our pay.⁶¹⁰

The foregoing, uncharacteristically pensive letter was not found duplicated in the exchange. The sorrowful substance may have been too soft for the deceitful, conniving Mormon villain editors were painting.

A greater cost was the apostasy of a portion of prominent figures in the Kirtland Mormon body and Smith’s quorum of apostles, the leading ecclesiastical body next to Smith’s presidency established in February 1835.⁶¹¹ Smith was acutely aware of the spreading word of Mormon worldliness. The *Messenger and Advocate* of April 1837 filled one of its agendas as Smith’s means to unify his faithful followers by issuing a warning voice against the avarice of the unfaithful. Smith intended his accusations to be

the failure of the institution escaped unharmed through their deviousness when the honest contributor suffered the greatest harm. See “Kirtland, Ohio, July, 1837,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, July 1837, 537–38.

⁶¹⁰ C., “About Matters in Kirtland,” 198. It was not to be. Investors’ losses were estimated at forty thousand dollars, equivalent to the cost of the Kirtland Temple. See Marvin S. Hill, C. Keith Rooker, and Larry T. Wimmer, “The Kirtland Economy Revisited: A Market Critique of Sectarian Economics,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 455.

⁶¹¹ See “Minutes, Discourse, and Blessings, 14–15 February 1835, Page 147,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 18, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-discourse-and-blessings-14-15-february-1835/1>.

seen and applied both to tainted Mormons and non-Mormons dedicated to the overthrow of Mormon success—those who “excuse themselves and justify their conduct, [whose] whole tenor of their lives was one continued scene of worldly mindedness, if not of fraud and deception.” Biblical curses for the guilty abounded for 207 lines and the unrepentant were forewarned: “you *are not*, you *cannot* be innocent. Your riches may take to themselves wings and fly away, bitter remorse shall sting you and that worm that never dies shall eat as doth a canker.”⁶¹²

The extent of personal spiritual and fiscal damages of 1837 led to a coup in the temple by the growing group of disaffected who attempted to dethrone their fallen prophet.⁶¹³ Mormon poet and Kirtland eyewitness, Eliza R. Snow, was saddened that “as the Saints drank in the love and spirit of the world, the Spirit of the Lord withdrew from their hearts, and they were filled with pride and hatred toward those who maintained their integrity.”⁶¹⁴ Newspapermen unfriendly to the Mormon cause all through the country were more than willing to spread the word.

⁶¹² W. A. Cowdery, “A Faithful Man Shall Abound with Blessings: But He That Maketh Haste to Be Rich Shall Not Be Innocent,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, April 1837, 491–93; italics in original.

⁶¹³ To many, Smith’s meddling in financial affairs instead of confining himself to religious concerns and his inaccurate predictions of the success of the Kirtland Safety Society were undeniable evidence that he either never did operate with God’s authority or that he was a fallen prophet.

⁶¹⁴ Eliza R. Snow, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Company, Printers, 1884), 20–21; see also Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, And His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 211.

Damming the Deceit

Editors of neighboring newspapers surprisingly found no use in their columns of Smith's loss of many of his principal figures. Instead, fifteen articles from May to November 1837 focused on fraudulent uses of the disbanded bills, further evidence for the agenda of criminality and the vilifying trait of the national harms Mormonism was causing. The Cleveland *Daily Herald and Gazette* reported on May 1, 1837, that the Mormon institution was sending runners through the nearby country "endeavoring to palm on the public their trash [the worthless currency].... They are ransacking our country, buying up all the horses they can get, and paying for them with this trash, which I do not believe to be worth a straw."⁶¹⁵ The agendas of Mormon dishonesty and criminality were obvious; uninformed, hard-working Americans would be cheated out of their goods and left holding valueless money if not alerted. Moreover, the editor warned that the Mormons had set their sights on breaking at least three Ohio banks out of spite. "My object in writing," penned the gentleman, is "to inquire whether some course cannot be adopted to expose these scoundrels to the world."⁶¹⁶ At least six articles in Ohio and Michigan gave evidence that the Mormon bills were exasperating the national problem of counterfeiting.⁶¹⁷ And operators of an orphans' institute seventy-two miles south of

⁶¹⁵ "Extract from a Letter Received by a Gentleman in This City," *Daily Herald and Gazette*, May 1, 1837.

⁶¹⁶ "Extract from a Letter Received by a Gentleman in This City"; see also *Maumee Express*, May 13, 1837, 3.

⁶¹⁷ Newspapers reported instances of both male and female counterfeiters being apprehended while passing Kirtland Safety Society bills of various denominations. See, for example, "More Nabbing," *Daily Herald and Gazette*, August 22, 1837; "More Suspensions," *Daily Herald and Gazette*, August 28, 1837; "Look out for Swindlers and Counterfeiters," *Constantine Republican*, November 22, 1837, 1; "Kirtland Money,"

Kirtland who intended to print notes “in imitation of Bank bills” were strongly advised that “the fate of the *Mormon Bank, at Kirtland*, is a sufficient warning against such experiments.”⁶¹⁸

By July 1837, Smith’s agenda-setting energies were condensed to the central concern of dissociating the Mormons from the spreading criminality they were said to be practicing:

CAUTION. To the brethren and friends of the church of Latter Day Saints, I am disposed to say a word relative to the bills of the Kirtland Safety Society Bank. I hereby warn them to beware of speculators, renegadoes and gamblers, who are duping the unsuspecting and the unwary, by palming upon them, those bills, which are of no worth, here. I discountenance and disapprove of any and all such practices. I know them to be detrimental to the best interests of society, as well as to the principles of religion. JOSEPH SMITH Jun.⁶¹⁹

Whether the desperados were Mormon was not the issue. The effect of editors’ agendas to prove Mormon fraud, and thus their dishonesty and criminality, was inescapable. Mormonism’s currency, ethereal and temporal, was now tainted far beyond the reach of the paper money by the traveling text of the exchange. The Cleveland *Daily Herald and Gazette* invited its readers on September 7, 1837, to enact their disdain for the Mormons by “judging [voting]” against them in the upcoming election.⁶²⁰ For one inflamed reader, “A Mechanic,” democratic denial was insufficient, and the paper of the following day printed his much harsher invitation: “I hope they will try and not only judge, but *execute*

Daily Herald and Gazette, July 17, 1837, 2.

⁶¹⁸ ““Stark County Orphan’s Institute’ CAUTION TO THE PUBLIC,” *Daily Herald and Gazette*, July 1, 1837; italics and capitalization in original.

⁶¹⁹ Joseph Smith Jr., “CAUTION,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, August 1837, 560; spelling and emphases in original.

⁶²⁰ “Note These Facts.”

both [Joe Smith and S. Rigdon] and their associates, ... [the] body corporate ... of the *Kirtland Safety Society Bank*.”⁶²¹ Gradual, constant vilifying agendas were achieving their purposes. American readers were becoming convinced of a diabolical Mormonism sufficiently to elicit bold, open death threats against Mormon leaders.

Mormon Printing of 1837

Persecution and its Unification Agenda

The fallout of the Kirtland Safety Society dominated Mormon thought and became a primary focus of their printing in 1837. January and March issues of the *Messenger and Advocate* devoted a combined 696 lines to the topic of persecution, approximately fourteen modern double-spaced pages, penned by Sidney Rigdon, Smith’s Kirtland Campbellite-turned-Mormon companion. As persecution had been the lot of believers in all ages of the world, Rigdon affirmed that “the saints of the last days may calculate on being scandalized by every evil epithet which malice and ignorance combined can event.” For two columns, Rigdon addressed the irony that “those who made the greatest boast of their liberties,” namely freedom of religion and freedom of the press, “would use all their exertions to take away the just rights of others.” The Kirtland antagonism was evidence that “there is not a State in this UNION, where a man is at liberty to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience.”⁶²² However, among the “whole brood of persecutors [there is] not one single one who is honest enough to

⁶²¹ A Mechanic, “For the Herald and Gazette,” *Daily Herald and Gazette*, September 8, 1837; italics in original.

⁶²² Sidney Rigdon, “PERSECUTION,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, January 1837, 436; capitalization and emphases in original.

confess that they persecute a man purely on account of his religion; [but instead,] they will hatch up some cause to justify themselves in their wickedness.” The failure of the Mormon money was hardly just “some cause;” nevertheless, was the financial scheme doomed to failure simply because of its Mormon parentage?⁶²³

Rigdon engaged the less-frequent Mormon vilification practice by implicating his former flock-mates, the Campbellites, and alluded to Hurlbut’s affidavits⁶²⁴ and the surprising sharpness with which the character-blistering claims had been made by those who knew Smith so poorly. Editors were constantly deepening the damage to the Mormon persona through their “scandalous” conduct of disseminating their defacing agendas filled with such “base lies which they have made and circulated in order to stop the progress of the truth.” Incapable of erasing the effects of the successful non-Mormon agendas, Rigdon retreated to the Mormon agenda of unifying the downtrodden Mormons with the polarizing principle of persecution: “Let us then do as [Christ] did before; let us endure with much long-suffering the contradiction of sinners against ourselves, until he who is our life shall appear, and then shall we appear with him in glory.”⁶²⁵ This emotional tactic of the faithful could not be refuted by thousands of lines of antagonistic text but was, instead, only further ingrained with each successive printed attack.

⁶²³ S. R., “PERSECUTION,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, March 1837, 477.

⁶²⁴ This was the Doctor Philastus Hurlbut (“Doctor” was his given name, not a title) introduced in Chapter 6 who was commissioned by a Kirtland committee in early 1834 to interview New Yorkers in Palmyra and Manchester to collect affidavits against the debauched character of the adolescent Smith and his family. He was the original claimant that the Book of Mormon was a manuscript written by one deceased Solomon Spaulding, which Smith had plagiarized to fabricate the Book of Mormon.

⁶²⁵ S. R., “PERSECUTION,” 479; punctuation updated for readability.

Still Searching for the Scapegoat

The strain of both the national financial collapse and the immediate local losses of the Safety Society caused the Mormons to name a culprit proportionally as much as non-Mormon editors—though the Mormon need for justification in the process was palpable. Mormon editors endeavored to deflect the blame and establish the fault in other factors. The first attempt in June 1837 claimed that the Kirtland experience was not isolated and, therefore, not a result of Mormon association. “As other adjacent places have been made to feel a reversal of fortune, so have we,” the *Messenger and Advocate* explicated. “We speak not of these as calamities peculiar to our little town. We mention them because they are common to our whole country, and because causes of a similar nature have combined to produce nearly the same effect throughout our whole country.”⁶²⁶ Although fundamentally true, the thoroughness of oppositional editors’ vilifying agendas of continually incriminating the Mormons for the failure nullified the transparent attempt to redirect blame. Local fury, growing in Kirtland for seven years, trumped national commiseration.

The Mormon printed approach to shift culpability in July 1837 assumed a stronger stance that was determined and defiant. Smith and his leading associates were referred to in stark third-person and the documentary-style description of the unsuccessful charter and the “unpropitious circumstances [under which] the managers of the bank began its operation” was unapologetically detailed. The Society managers, now admittedly to have been unwise in the venture and who were undermined by citizens with “diametrically

⁶²⁶ *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, June 1837, 522; punctuation updated for readability.

opposite motives,” lightly transferred the blame to unintelligent and undiscerning investors. “We are not bankers, bank stock holders, or financiers,” it frankly testified.⁶²⁷

As for the spiritually deflated, a scolding was in order:

Whenever a people have unlimited confidence in a civil or ecclesiastical ruler or rulers, who are but men like themselves, and begin to think they can do no wrong, they increase their tyranny, and oppression, establish a principle that man, poor frail lump of mortality like themselves, is infallible.⁶²⁸

Those guilty of such blind following were unworthy of “the name of a freeman, who thus tamely surrenders, the rights the privileges, and immunities of an independent citizen.”

The only solution was intelligence against such ignorance and from henceforth, all brethren were recommended to “be good and peaceful citizens of that Government which protects them and guard all their present rights, and privileges with a vigilant eye.”⁶²⁹

Despite the Mormon attempts to disclaim responsibility, the printed efforts fell flat, and readers appeared to remain convinced Smith was a moral enemy of American well-being.

The Making of a Martyr

Readers in ten newspapers in six states—Massachusetts, New York, Maryland, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania—opened their June 1837 issues to find

⁶²⁷ “Kirtland, Ohio, July, 1837,” 536, 539; spelling in original. Crawley indicates Warren A. Cowdery, editor of the *Messenger and Advocate* during this period, was falling out of favor with Smith and Mormon leaders who were dissatisfied with the direction of the paper. They were displeased with the proliferation of articles on ancient history and philosophy and the inattention to the progress of the Church. Crawley further avers that it was this July 1837 issue wherein Smith and others were criticized for their roles in the Kirtland Safety Society failure that W. Cowdery “became intolerable” and the Church authorities terminated the paper. Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, 1830-1847*, 1:47–49.

⁶²⁸ “Kirtland, Ohio, July, 1837,” 538.

⁶²⁹ “Kirtland, Ohio, July, 1837,” 538, 540.

the following:

A Prophet in Limbo.—The Mormon Prophet, Jo Smith, has lately been arrested ... as an accessory in an attempt to murder an unbeliever in his golden humbug. It seems Jo had a revelation that a certain skeptic [in Kirtland] deserved martyrdom, and soon found a couple of his followers stupid enough to obey his ministration. They were foiled in their attempt to shoot the individual; quarreled with the Prophet, and are now exhibiting this fiend ... in his true character. So say reports.⁶³⁰

The report was not outrageous to news hungry Americans fed by editors who kept accounts of the shocking and despicable before their readers.⁶³¹ The story was imbued with such rich potential for editors' agendas that for seven newspapers, it was their first article on Mormonism.

The intended martyr was a non-Mormon Kirtland farmer, clockmaker, furniture maker, merchant, banker, and businessman, Grandison Newell.⁶³² Newell wrote letters to

⁶³⁰ "A Prophet in Limbo," *New Bedford Mercury*, June 16, 1837, 2; spelling modernized, but italics in original; see also "The Mormon Prophet Arrested for Murder," *Transcript*, June 13, 1837, 2; "The Mormon Prophet Arrested for Murder," *Maryland Gazette*, June 15, 1837; "A Prophet in Limbo!," *Connecticut Courant*, June 17, 1837, 2; "A Prophet in Limbo," *New York Spectator*, June 19, 1837, 1; "A Prophet in Limbo!," *New London Gazette*, June 21, 1837, 2. The "golden humbug" is a reference to the unbelievable nature surrounding Smith's claim to have discovered a set of gold plates from which his religion and calling sprang.

⁶³¹ For example, Americans had been enthralled with the putative but unproved murder of Elijah Pearson by the ostentatious Robert Matthews (alias, Mathias) who had, as discussed in Chapter 6, escaped a murder charge (though not in the minds of Americans), and found his way to, and reportedly into the Mormon society in Kirtland. Matthias appeared again in the press in July 1837 indicating his intention to muddle the Mormons. Questioned on his journey to Kirtland, he responded that "he came in obedience to the injunctions of a vision, to regulate the Mormonites, at Kirtland, and spread his new doctrine among the benighted of the west." The report was found at least twice in the exchange. "Matthias the Prophet," *New York Spectator*, July 17, 1837.

⁶³² See Dale W. Adams, "Grandison Newell's Obsession," *Journal of Mormon History* 30, no. 1 (2004): 159–88. Newell was also financier of Doctor Philastus Hurlbut's contemptuous affidavits extracted from Smith's New York past and printed in E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled* in 1834, as described in Chapter 6. See "Grandison

the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* charging Smith with the death threat and defending himself against doubts about the murder arrangement. He claimed that Smith, “emboldened by success in his wicked schemes hesitates not to use his authority as the revelator of the will of Heaven, to incite his followers to remove those who have opposed his treachery and fraud, by assassination.”⁶³³

Newell then recounted the plot of Smith, the “high priest of satan.” Two of Smith’s saints met on a predetermined night with loaded rifles and pistols and a determination to kill him in his house while with his family. However, despite the prophet’s lavishing “promises of great temporal and spiritual good” upon the obedient assassins, they, at the final moment, “trembled under the awful responsibility of committing murder, [and] a little cool reflection in darkness and silence, broke the spell of the false prophet.” The softened perpetrators then shrank from their duties, rejoicing to be free of the power of the devil and his co-adjutor Smith and to have narrowly avoided staining their souls with a crime so horrible.⁶³⁴

The fifty-five-line letter published in the *Painesville (OH) Telegraph* concluded with the accusatory cause of Smith’s reckless revelation—that Smith was determined to “procure my death because I fearlessly exposed to the contempt and indignation of an outraged community, your flagitious plans” concerning the financial society.⁶³⁵ Newell

Newell – Biography,” The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 18, 2018, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/grandison-newell?highlight=Grandison%20Newell>.

⁶³³ Grandison Newell, “TO SIDNEY RIGDON—Letter No. 2,” *Painesville Telegraph*, May 26, 1837, 3.

⁶³⁴ Newell, 3.

⁶³⁵ Newell, 3; spelling and capitalization in original. “Of persons: Guilty of or

filed a complaint in April 1837 with the Painesville justice of the peace of just cause to fear that Smith would kill him or procure other persons to do it.⁶³⁶ Newell was less transparent about his own actions with the Kirtland Safety Society or the source of antagonism between himself and Smith but concluded with a triumphal interrogative: “Is it not time for the People to give attention to imposters who preach murder and assassination by pretended revelation from heaven?”⁶³⁷ As a result, Smith was arrested and brought before the justice on May 30, 1837, to respond to the allegations.

The story was quickly picked up by editors who used it to further their chosen agendas of Mormon dishonesty and criminality. No fewer than thirty-two articles were discovered in newspapers published in cities in eleven states: from Vevay, Indiana, to New York City, some seven hundred miles distant, and from Painesville, Ohio, to Camden, South Carolina, a distance of 620 miles.⁶³⁸ It was the most-discussed Mormon topic in the press of 1837 aside from the Kirtland Safety Society. Ten of the articles

addicted to atrocious crimes; deeply criminal, extremely wicked. Of actions, character, or principles: Extremely wicked or criminal; heinous, villainous.” “Flagitious,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁶³⁶ See Walker, “The Kirtland Safety Society and the Fraud of Grandison Newell: A Legal Examination,” 59–60. Newell was said to have bought up as many of the early Safety Society notes as he could and, returning to the Society office, demanded exchange for specie, which caused, or was part of the cause, of the depletion of hard currency and closure of the bank. Newell’s constant opposition to Smith caused Walker to label him as Smith’s “nemesis.”

⁶³⁷ Newell, “TO SIDNEY RIGDON—Letter No. 2,” 3; capitalization in original; punctuation updated. Although the last sentence of the article is a rhetorical question, it was printed without a question mark.

⁶³⁸ It was the *Camden (SC) Commercial Courier*’s first mention of Mormonism, an objective yet provocative five-line article stating Smith was now in jail “for attempting to shoot one of his backsliding brethren, in compliance with a revelation, which, said he, required his death.” June 24, 1837.

stemmed from one Cleveland exchange paper with subtle but illustrative changes, which illuminates the personalities and differences in agendas of editors across the country.⁶³⁹

The Philadelphia *Saturday Courier* of June 17, 1837, offered the most poetic version of events in what appears to be its first-time foray into the lucrative printing venture of Mormonism. The editor's jocularly concerning the attempted assassination was a stark contrast to the solemnity other editors maintained to reveal the demon Smith. For example, the reason to dispatch Newell was that "dead men tell no tales," but the troublesome Newell "wouldn't stay shot." Smith's conspirators, on the other hand, feared the hangman's noose and gave up Smith as the instigator

of the diabolical shooting scheme; and thereupon the said Joe was regularly served up ... with a little more than common prospect that he will feel the rope "tightening around the wisend" for the villainous impositions and rascalities of which he has been guilty. What a pickle for the Prophet of the Golden Bible!⁶⁴⁰

Editors both sarcastic and serious nonetheless shaped public thought by setting the agenda of criminality. This time, Smith was portrayed as a megalomaniacal murderer who abused his power over his followers to silence anyone that might expose his nefarious plans.

⁶³⁹ See "The Mormon Prophet," *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, June 2, 1837, 2.

⁶⁴⁰ "A Prophet in the Limbo," *Saturday Courier*, June 17, 1837, 2; spelling, emphasis, and capitalization in original. At least six papers replicated the title "A prophet in Limbo" while some added an exclamation point or other italics or capitalization for emphasis. This is the only article to have been found to insert the word "the" prior to "limbo" in the title. The early nineteenth-century use of the word *limbo* indicated the region supposed to exist on the border of Hell. See "Limbo," *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

The Prophet Acquitted

Most papers were skeptical that Smith would be found guilty. The Rhode Island *Newport Mercury* and the Massachusetts *New Bedford Mercury* were convinced in July 1837 that Smith, “who was sent to gaol a short time since on a charge of attempting to prophecy a backslider into eternity,” would go free. “We dare say the wretch will be suffered to go clear among the thousand and one scamps that infest the country by their [pestilent] fanaticism,” the editors 636 miles away from Kirtland wrote.⁶⁴¹

The results of the trial were reported in the press the same day and expanded throughout the exchange in less than a week. “The trial of [the Mormon prophet] on a charge of inducing two of his followers to destroy the life of a Mr. Newell, has resulted in a verdict of acquittal,” the June 1837 *New York Spectator* informed.⁶⁴² Nevertheless, for the first time, an additional acidic charge was leveled against Smith. The Wisconsin Territory *Milwaukee Advertiser* observed, “We believe this is the twelfth trial the prophet of the ‘golden plates’ has passed through without a conviction.”⁶⁴³ Editors suspected readers would be incensed at Smith’s growing legal slipperiness and used it in their vilifying agendas of dishonesty and criminality to portray an untouchable religious

⁶⁴¹ *Newport Mercury*, July 1, 1837, 1; spelling in original; *New Bedford Mercury*, June 23, 1837, 2. The digital scan of the 187-year-old newspaper obscures the word beginning with “pest....” The article has not as yet been found in the exchange for clarification, and it is only with feelings of great defeat that the word *pestilent*, which is not likely to be accurate based on surrounding illegible letters, has been substituted. English literary heritage is evident in the spelling of *gaol*, or *jail*. The Oxford English Dictionary lists both variations as correct in British official use.

⁶⁴² “The Mormon Prophet,” *New York Spectator*, June 26, 1837; capitalization in original; see also *Daily Herald and Gazette*, June 17, 1837; “Joe Smith the Mormon Prophet,” *Ohio Repository*, June 22, 1837, 3; “Joe Smith the Mormon Prophet,” 3.

⁶⁴³ *Milwaukee Advertiser*, July 22, 1837, 3.

magistrate, the idea of which flew in the face of First Amendment freedoms that broke the shackles of state-mandated religions and despots. The indictment stuck. Smith could not escape the attribution, which assumed a regular position in print for the rest of his life, particularly later in Nauvoo, Illinois, prior to his own murder in the summer of 1844.⁶⁴⁴

Newell was disgusted. He had sought the protection of the laws of the land but instead, his appeal was ignored. The judge insinuated that his hatred of Smith, not his fear, induced the prosecution. Newell continued to resort to the press in June 1837 and expended 147 lines on the murder plot, his exposure of the fraudulent bank, the character of the witnesses, and that Smith's assassination conspiracy originated in deep revenge against Newell for exposing him. The damning evidence Newell could not believe had been disregarded was Smith's threat as heard in the office of the bank by Orson Hyde, a Mormon apostle. Hyde testified that Smith had said "that Newell, if he commenced suits for unlawful banking against any of the Mormons, ought to be put where the crows could not find him; that it would be no sin to kill him."⁶⁴⁵

No rebuttal from Smith was found in non-Mormon papers either because Smith wrote them but editors chose not to publish them, or because Smith simply did not write any because of previous refutation attempts being twisted and used against him. However, neither did Smith avail himself of the Mormon paper in the agenda to correct

⁶⁴⁴ See Madsen, Walker, and Welch, *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith's Legal Encounters*. For an example of the strengthening claim that Smith was above the law and an editor who was "mortified that there is not efficacy in the law to bring such a scamp to justice," see Thomas C. Sharp, "Recent Attempt to Arrest the Prophet," *Warsaw Signal*, August 13, 1842, 3.

⁶⁴⁵ Grandison Newell, "Mr. Editor," *Painesville Telegraph*, June 30, 1837, 3.

misperceptions to emphasize his acquittal or negate the negative publicity. The only mention of Newell came a year later in August 1838 in a new Mormon paper published in Far West, Missouri, in which Smith called Newell “a poor persecuting booby ... who in fact was scarcely a grade above the beast that perish.”⁶⁴⁶

Mormon printers announced in August 1837 the decision to close the nearly three-year run of the *Messenger and Advocate*. In its place, a new monthly paper, the *Elders' Journal*, edited by Smith and printed in Kirtland, would focus on the agenda of providing a vehicle of communication for the growing number of Mormon elders (missionaries) being sent abroad.⁶⁴⁷ Neither paper mentioned Newell before Smith and others were forced to flee Kirtland in early 1838. Grandison Newell's problematic profile for the Mormons disappeared from the press as quickly as it began but left a trail through eighteen cities across half the states in the Union.

Mentions of Mormonism in 1837, an average of fourteen per month, increased 21

⁶⁴⁶ “Argument to Argument Where I Find It: Ridicule to Ridicule, and Scorn to Scorn,” *Elders' Journal*, August 1838, 58. “Booby” is a dull, heavy, stupid fellow; a clown, a nincompoop. “Booby,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/view/Entry/21393>.

⁶⁴⁷ See Sidney Rigdon, “PROSPECTUS,” *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, August 1837, 545. The *Elders' Journal* ran for only two issues, one in October and another in November 1837 before the Mormons were forced to leave Kirtland. The Mormons resumed the paper in their next locale, Far West, Missouri, in 1838, but it, too, was printed for only two issues, July and August 1838, before Smith and other leaders were imprisoned and the body of the church was driven from the state. An additional piece of evidence that demonstrates Mormon preoccupation with the agenda of dispelling, changing, or correcting the image non-Mormon editors were portraying is Smith's plan to answer twenty recurring questions in circulation about him. His responses were originally to be included in the December 1837 *Elders' Journal*, but because of the need to flee Kirtland, they were not printed until the July 1838 issue in Far West, Missouri. See “Be It Known unto the Saints Scattered Abroad Greeting:,” *Elders' Journal*, November 1837, 28–29; *Elders' Journal*, July 1838, 42–44.

percent, with a 31 percent upsurge of critical editorials over 1836. The percentage of neutral articles remained about the same at 43 percent as the nation observed in local and national papers the disintegration of and nearing forceful exit from the Mormon Ohio empire. Editors advanced their agendas of Mormon dishonesty, criminality, and vilification on the two Mormon events that dominated the printed landscape with no fewer than 106 articles, which was 61 percent of the 1837 total.

Conclusion

The late winter months of 1837 proved to be Smith's last in what had become for him a dangerous Kirtland. The temple was in the hands of apostates. Additional lawsuits loomed. And, Smith's departure in early January 1838 was unfriendly and hasty. Eighteen newspapers announced they had learned from a reliable source that "the Mormon Society at Kirtland is breaking up. Smith and Rigdon, after prophecying the destruction of the town, left with their families in the night, and others of the faithful are following."⁶⁴⁸ Smith and members of his hierarchy were pursued for miles while fleeing to a growing Mormon settlement in Far West, Missouri.

On January 15, 1838, the Kirtland printing press erupted in flames, scorching the nearby temple. Newspapers printed the resulting accusations: Mormons declared it was done by anti-Mormon aggressors while non-Mormons asserted it was a Mormon arsonist

⁶⁴⁸ "Trouble among the Mormons," *Daily Herald and Gazette*, January 25, 1838, col. c; capitalization in original; see also "Trouble among the Mormons," *Cleveland Herald and Gazette*, January 26, 1838, 3; "Trouble among the Mormons," *Western Reserve Chronicle*, January 30, 1838, 3; "Trouble among the Mormons," *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, February 3, 1838, col. f.

instructed to prevent the press from falling into the hands of nonbelievers.⁶⁴⁹ More than 1,600 members were forced on the third Mormon exodus.⁶⁵⁰ One Mormon woman mused, “I am not pained at the thought of leaving [Kirtland] for I have never felt at home here.... I believe there are good people in [Kirtland] but [it] is not a good place to make Mormons.”⁶⁵¹

The final two years of Mormonism in Kirtland of 1836 and 1837 saw editors set their agendas of Mormon dishonesty, criminality, and vilification before their readers in no fewer than 317 articles across the pages of 116 newspapers printed in seventy-one cities situated in twenty-two states and territories and in Nova Scotia. Mormons faced a 37 percent critical tone through these two years with 55 percent speaking neutrally and 5 percent writing positively of their industriousness and hospitality. Only approximately 1 percent printed with sympathetic purposes. The Mormons, in turn, churned out over twenty thousand lines of text in two newspapers. Readers in every state of the Union had subscribed to newspapers whose editors placed Mormonism in their pages according to one or more agendas. On average, editors somewhere in the country positioned Mormonism in the minds of subscribers every other day.

Vilification efforts of American editors in 1836 were fortified by the immense

⁶⁴⁹ See, for example, “Shew Me Thy Faith without Thy Works, and I Will Shew Thee My Faith by My Works,” *Western Telegraph*, March 16, 1838, 1.

⁶⁵⁰ Smith and his followers left New York in the winter of 1830-1831 because of persecution and divine direction that warned them of unseen dangers. Members of the Mormon establishment in Jackson County, Missouri, were driven from their homes in 1833. Abandoning Kirtland in the winter of 1837-1838 due to rising threats and violence was third in a chain of exoduses.

⁶⁵¹ As quoted in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 68.

letter, “More of Imposture,” and its equally large geographical coverage that included New York, Washington, D.C., Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. The article illustrates one characteristic of the first stage of Vanderford’s Vilification Theory, Identification of the Enemy, by stating the futility of reasoning with Mormons because they warped and controlled information. For example, the “Golden or Mormon Bible” was not only “stupid, senseless, incoherent and ill-contrived nonsense,” but was, more dangerously, “a singularly felicitous illustration of the perfection which may be obtained in transmuting good into bad—truth into error—[and] wisdom into absurdity.” The unimpeachable scriptures, copied in “large portions” into the Book of Mormon, were “garbled [and] mixed up with the vapid and nonsensical platitudes of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.”⁶⁵² Thus, per Vilification Theory, “it is futile to provide the truth for someone determined to subvert it,” or “to communicate with agents consistently described as lying, hiding information, and distorting issues.”⁶⁵³

Furthermore, the *New York Spectator* averred, the Mormon didactic “shows what monstrous results may be obtained by acting on the moral and religious natures of mankind, without cultivating at the same time the reasoning powers” to judge it correctly.⁶⁵⁴ The Mormon enemy with its propensity to cloud minds and change truth could not, therefore, merely be combated with discussion. American papers were conditioning the public to accept that something more was needed.

⁶⁵² “More of Imposture.”

⁶⁵³ Vanderford, “Vilification and Social Movements: A Case Study of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Rhetoric,” 178.

⁶⁵⁴ “More of Imposture.”

The process of vilification culminated in the fourth stage by Magnifying the Opponent's Power, and Mormon numbers spoke louder than words. The correspondent provided the repeating papers with the inarguable Mormon ability to enact their diabolical motives—diabolical because of their intent to injure family, friends, home, and country—in its assertion that “these people have a great establishment at Kirtland, and, strange as it may seem, have become so numerous that they talk of controlling the elections—which we have been credibly informed they are quite able to do in some of the towns.” Readers were warned that Mormon societies were surging across the country in numbers with similar abilities.⁶⁵⁵ The politically manipulating statistics were a call to action; heinous was a group bent on overriding the constitutional democracy that came at such a high national price, or which threatened those already fixed in secretive associations with common political aspirations.⁶⁵⁶

The exhaustive correspondence also meticulously magnified the opponent's power by giving evidence that when faced by the failures of faith and law, “the prophet extricated himself very dexterously ... by [regularly] having a new revelation” that faulted the faithless and absolved himself of both spiritual and temporal implication.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁵ “More of Imposture.” For the sake of not multiplying citations used earlier in the chapter, these examples of Vilification Theory have been drawn from the original article in the July 1836 *New York Spectator*, although fourteen papers in seven states stretching from New England to Missouri reprinted the same key vilifying portions of text.

⁶⁵⁶ Leonard L. Richards, researcher of American mobs, argued that American mob violence was rarely “spontaneous outbursts,” but was explicitly planned by “gentlemen of property and standing” who stood to lose both property and standing unless opponents were prevented from inhibiting the structure that kept them in power. See his seminal work, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*.

⁶⁵⁷ “More of Imposture.”

Smith's position and societal placement was becoming untouchable, a key component of a cultural villain. This element of vilification established in the Kirtland era was continued and expanded by editors in later years.⁶⁵⁸

As the aggression against Smith and the Mormons in Kirtland increased in 1837, printed vilification decreased. No instances of clearly identifiable vilification were discovered in the 179 articles written about Mormons in 1837. Criticism and disdain abounded, but the calculated, shaping vernacular characteristic of vilification was not found. One wonders why. It may have been because editors and readers were occupied by larger national concerns. The war hero Andrew Jackson left office as a period of economic expansion began to fall and prices rose. Martin Van Buren inherited a nation slipping into the financial crisis of 1837 that became a major recession until the mid-1840s. Suffering Americans looked beyond a remote, fanatical religion for whom to blame.⁶⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Mormonism remained a point of intrigue in 1837. Articles about them appeared, on average, every other day in newspapers published somewhere in the United States. The reality of the seven-year-old religion was inescapable. "Truly, in this thing, Smith has signalized himself, and *Mormonism* become a matter of history," the front page of the July 10, 1837, *Boston Courier* announced.⁶⁶⁰

Printed texts on Mormonism in the last two Kirtland years of 1836 and 1837

⁶⁵⁸ Additional vilification of 1836 concerned the Missouri epic and the undeniable dangers the Mormon Army, the Camp of Israel, posed to American liberty and land as they marched cross country to assist their exiled compatriots. The topic was, as explained, delimited from the dissertation.

⁶⁵⁹ See Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis*.

⁶⁶⁰ "Mormonia," *Boston Courier*, July 10, 1837, 1; spelling and italics in original.

exposed the rich “components that are embedded in a social, cultural and political context [that was] framed by time and place.”⁶⁶¹ The collection, grouping, and analyzing of editors’ agendas in this chapter revealed a centralized and common set of truths both local and national readers were intended to accept. Coverage of a variety of Mormon topics made its way into every state in the Union shaping the private and public image of Mormonism according to the non-Mormon agendas of proving Mormon dishonesty, criminality, and power. Moreover, clear evidences of specific vilification efforts were found that demonstrated that editors did not simply speak distastefully of Mormonism but enacted a psychological process to elicit action against a diabolical Mormon enemy. The efficacy of these efforts is affirmed, in part, by the Mormon selection of which non-Mormon texts they expended effort to refute or affirm and with what degree of intensity. Within these exertions were found the Mormon agendas to dispel, correct, or offset incorrect perceptions, unify scattered members, and portray a persecuted people. Thus, the journalism history lens offers historians and scholars new insights into Mormonism’s adolescence during its final years in Kirtland.

In Chapter 8, the Conclusion, I offer an analysis of the findings of this dissertation and respond to the research questions proposed at the outset. I explore the significance of the unexpected number of sources discovered during this expansive project and discuss the revisionist implications it merits concerning the power and scope of the nineteenth-century press. I also identify additional avenues for research, particularly the potential of identifying patterns across thousands of newspapers.

⁶⁶¹ Brennen and Hardt, “Introduction to Part One,” 7.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

*Newspaper work is the best work—since the greatest thing that a man can do is deal with millions of others. Newspaper power is the greatest power, for it is the power that shapes and directs the thoughts of men. And there is no power but thought.*⁶⁶²

Introduction

Smith and his saints fled persecution in New York in the winter of 1830-1831 for the prospects of the frontier potential of practicing their religion unhindered in Kirtland, Ohio. They found, instead, that they could not escape the perpetual distribution of editors' agendas that attempted to position readers throughout the country against them. As those agendas sharpened through the stages of vilification, the Mormons became increasingly aware that local communities were growing agitated.

The Kirtland gorge widened through the months of the fall and winter of 1837, and editors emphasized the unscrupulousness of Smith and Rigdon's departure in January 1838. "The Mormons have dissolved their body, which had collected ... under Joe Smith and Sidney Rigdon," seven papers in Ohio, New York, Vermont, and Pennsylvania

⁶⁶² Talcott Williams, "Pay and Pecuniary Reward," in *The American Journalism History Reader: Critical and Primary Texts*, ed. Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (New York: Routledge, 2011), 340–41. Talcott Williams (1849-1928) established himself after graduating from Amherst in 1873 with his work at the *New York World*, *New York Sun*, *The Springfield (MA) Republican*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* and as an editor for thirty years of the *Philadelphia Press*. In 1912 he became director of the fledgling Columbia University Pulitzer School of Journalism. See "Talcott Williams," *The Phi Beta Kappa Key* 6, no. 11 (March 1928): 702–4.

echoed; “These leaders recently decamped with their families, in the night.”⁶⁶³ The Sing-Sing, New York, *Hudson River Chronicle* scoffed at the ironies: “It is a pity that these exclusively inspired people cannot get along without quarrels and divisions among themselves.” For, the editor continued, if the “Messiah is to make his second advent” as soon as they prophesied, one “should think that his *chosen saints* could find better employment for their heads and hearts, than warring with each other.”⁶⁶⁴

Editors offered evidence of the agenda of Smith’s criminality, one of six agendas identified in this study, which was provided by the costliest of Smith’s adversaries, his former fellows: “An exposure of the proceedings of the [Kirtland Safety] Society is in course of preparation by one [Warren] Parrish, the former Confidential Secretary of the prophet Smith. He has the records, &c., in his possession.”⁶⁶⁵ No fewer than twenty papers spread word that the disenfranchised Parrish threatened exposure of Smith’s complicity in the failure of the bank.

Editors likewise continued with their agenda of devaluing the Mormon body.

⁶⁶³ “The Scioto (Ohio) Gazette States That,” *Newport Mercury*, February 24, 1838, 3; parenthetical statement in original; see also “The Mormons,” *New York Spectator*, February 26, 1838, col. c; “The Scioto (Ohio) Gazette States That,” *Vermont Chronicle*, February 28, 1838, col. c; “The Mormons,” *Columbia Democrat*, March 3, 1838, 2; “The Scioto (Ohio) Gazette States That,” *Republican Compiler*, March 6, 1838, 1.

⁶⁶⁴ “Mormonism: Trouble among the Mormons,” *Hudson River Chronicle*, February 13, 1838, 3; italics and capitalization in original.

⁶⁶⁵ “Trouble among the Mormons,” January 25, 1838, col. c; spelling and capitalization in original; Parrish’s name corrected; see also “Trouble among the Mormons,” January 26, 1838, 3; “Trouble among the Mormons,” February 3, 1838, col. f; “Trouble among the Mormons,” *New York Spectator*, February 3, 1838, col. e; “Trouble among the Mormons,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 9, 1838, 3; “Trouble among the Mormons,” *Vermont Chronicle*, February 14, 1838, col. e; “Trouble among the Mormons,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 15, 1838, 3.

Drawing on a nonexistent *New York Gazette* for “another testimony,” the *Hudson River Chronicle* pronounced: “The ‘latter day saints’ like other saints are showing symptoms of mutiny.” The seven years of agenda-setting had worked. The body of Kirtland Mormonism was crumbling and editors reported the effects: “On the whole, Mormonism is in a bad way.”⁶⁶⁶ Smith and his family journeyed more than eight hundred miles west to join the growing group of Mormons settling in the vast, nearly uninhabited prairies of Far West, Missouri. They arrived in the spring of 1838 and were again filled with the hope of settling in peace and establishing a dedicated community free of antagonists. Yet, as before, the reach of agendas was inescapable and the process began again.

Research Findings, Questions, and Cultural History

The Kirtland era of Mormonism from 1831 to 1837 was the longest stay of the Church during the life of its founder Joseph Smith Jr. Kirtland Mormons made local, national, and international news during their tenancy. The agendas of editors of more than 1,600 articles in 325 newspapers endeavored to shape the opinions of readers on Mormonism in no fewer than 161 cities. The country had admitted twenty-six states into the Union by 1837 and Mormons were discussed in newspapers in fully twenty-four of them. Articles about the believers also were published in periodicals in three territories, Upper Canada, Nova Scotia, and London, England.⁶⁶⁷ The Post Office Act of 1792 created the newspaper exchange in hopes of unifying the expanding United States

⁶⁶⁶ “Another Testimony,” *Hudson River Chronicle*, February 13, 1838, 3; capitalization and contraction in original.

⁶⁶⁷ Only Delaware and New Jersey newspapers were not found to address the Mormons by 1837, though both had by 1839.

through the diffusion and replication of news and by its capability for editors to broadcast their Mormon agendas throughout the length and width of the country.

Editors kept their town, city, state, territory, and nation under constant surveillance and addressed new topics and phenomena such as Mormonism. Setting their agendas on such topics was a way to regulate attitudes on religion, politics, morality, and patriotism, and establish and marginalize the “other.” The web of news production legitimized and delegitimized the uniquely American phenomenon of Mormonism. By reading, rereading, tracing, and studying the 1,617 primary sources, I discovered how broad yet interconnected conversations on Mormons were and how Agenda Setting and Vilification theories were an effective tool to demonstrate the patterns. Although there remain concerns of historians about the dangers of top-down use of theories that direct findings, my bottom-up approach proved valuable in writing the cultural history of Mormonism from 1831 to 1837 and provided concrete evidence with which to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

Two questions sparked this study, and answers (and additional questions) quickly surfaced in the thousands of lines of print on Mormonism I discovered in untapped databases of digitized American newspapers and analyzed for this dissertation.

How did print culture and printed texts about and by the Mormons create, shape, change, and direct the trajectory of Mormonism in its Ohio years?

What does early Mormon history teach us about the atmosphere of print culture in nineteenth-century America?

The questions are addressed individually.

How did print culture and printed texts about and by the Mormons create, shape, change, and direct the trajectory of Mormonism in its Ohio years?

Non-Mormon Efforts

Smith could not have conceived the quantity of text and replication of agendas printed about his new religion during the Kirtland era. Although small pockets of Mormons existed throughout the country and Mormon missionaries traveled long distances, they most likely did not know how thorough the coverage was through each state in the Union. Of the 1,617 articles I discovered written in these seven years, 54 percent of the articles for the Kirtland epoch had an overt critical tone, 42 percent portrayed Mormonism in an overall neutral light, 3 percent of the articles acceded positive attributes, and 2 percent were sympathetic to the Mormon plight.⁶⁶⁸

Ohio newspapers were the most prolific about their co-inhabitants with 445 articles, or 28 percent of the total found for this study. Painesville, Ohio, editors contributed 115 editorials on their immediate neighbors. The national newspaper centers of Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, from which local editors relied for national news, cycled a combined 532 articles through their presses, or 33 percent of the texts. New York City newspapers 466 miles from Kirtland printed or copied 118 articles on Mormonism and Boston editors 618 miles away wrote or reproduced 112 articles on Mormonism. At least ten newspapers printed approximately thirty articles or more about the Mormons. Averaged over seven years, a newspaper somewhere through the country

⁶⁶⁸ The tone of an editor's article while setting the agenda is a central component to understanding the agenda, its intent, and to group like tones. To categorize editors' tones so that I might discover patterns and frequency, I coded each article with one of four editorial tonal characteristics: critical, neutral, positive, or sympathetic. See the Appendix for further information on the tones and the coding process.

printed about the Mormons every 1.5 days from 1831 to 1837. I was able to identify within this deluge of texts six primary agendas about the Mormons into which their commentary can be classified: dishonesty, criminality, fanaticism, credulity and gullibility, power, and vilification. By the replication of these printed agendas, editors were able to create, shape, change, and direct the trajectory of Mormonism while in Ohio.

Create

Editors in 1831 began with the agenda to create the Mormon identity for a country just learning of the new sect. The name *Mormon* was strange and not part of the American vocabulary. Readers of the *Brockport (NY) Free Press* were desirous to know the meaning and the editor obliged in April 1831. “The word Mormon comes from the Greek word *mormoo* [and signifies,] ‘*bugbear, hobgoblin, raw head and bloody bones.*’” The editor fine-tuned the definition for his agenda by informing his subscribers that Smith had unwittingly chosen a word that precisely revealed his purpose of “carrying out his experiment on human credulity to the greatest extent—even to give the book a name, in addition to its contents, which would carry on the very face of it the nature of its true character—a fiction of hobgoblins and bugbears.”⁶⁶⁹ The definition reappeared occasionally and its effectiveness in creating the initial perception of the Mormon name is evident by Smith’s agenda to offset it twelve years later in a Mormon paper to mean “more good.”⁶⁷⁰ His exasperation was evident but ineffective: editors quickly took Smith’s rebuttal into their agenda of Mormon fanaticism by discrediting Smith’s claims

⁶⁶⁹ “Mormon Bible,” 1; spelling and italics in original.

⁶⁷⁰ Smith, “Correspondence,” 2.

for the sake of their preposterousness.⁶⁷¹

Shape

Editors expended careful effort in their agendas to shape a repulsive image of Mormonism in the minds of Americans. In August and September 1831 descriptions of Mormon rights and practices that were offensive to American moral decency circled through one-third of the United States. Editors explained that the religious ceremonies of the blind and deluded devotees were obscene and blasphemous and “shocking to the sense of rational creatures. In their excesses, unrestrained by the presence of the opposite sex, and in one assembly—they roll naked on the floor, and exhibit a variety of grotesque and unseemly forms, that humanity would blush to name.”⁶⁷² Wherever they went or whenever they were discussed amongst townsfolk, Smith and his members and missionaries encountered strong preconceptions shaped by constant replication in the papers.

Two articles proved to be among the most widespread and reproduced that editors used in their agendas to shape the perception of the Mormon fanatical penchant for miracles. First was the Spring 1834 report of a Mormon missionary who was prevented from performing a miracle of walking on water. Nine editors in five states spanning 1,300 miles from Massachusetts to Iowa reproduced unmodified the lengthy account that the deceptive missionary had concealed planks just below the surface of the water. Unbeknownst to him, the miracle was sabotaged by unbelievers who severed the boards

⁶⁷¹ See “Mormon,” 4.

⁶⁷² “Mormonism,” September 9, 1831, 1.

and the deserving deceiver “instantly plunged, floundering and sinking in the watry mire.”⁶⁷³ The editors’ shrewd manner of shaping the obviously dishonest Mormon character was so effective at causing Americans to shake their heads in disgust that the Mormons countered immediately in their own paper. The Mormon editor was repulsed that “there are yet men to be found who are willing to exert every possible power to circulate, not only circulate, but *frame* falsehoods of every description and enormity, that has not a parallel in the annals of the world since the creation.”⁶⁷⁴

The second was another Mormon preacher who promised angelic sanction of a convert baptism but who was revealed by rascals to be Smith in disguise. Skeptics concealed themselves and ambushed “his Ghostship, after several most unghostlike attempts to escape and after a ducking in the river ... was taken bodily possession of, when it was found upon examination to be nothing more nor less than the Prophet himself.”⁶⁷⁵ The escapade was reprinted from January to August 1835 in thirty-one known papers in twenty-one cities and across fourteen states—approximately two-thirds of the Union.⁶⁷⁶ Of particular interest is that the article was left unchanged by each succeeding editor instead of the typical cutting, reshaping, elaborating, or bending to meet a variety of agendas. The exact replication highlights a common agenda across a

⁶⁷³ “Tragical Event,” April 5, 1834, 2; spelling in original.

⁶⁷⁴ April 1834, 12–13; emphases in original.

⁶⁷⁵ “Capture of a Mormon Angel,” July 7, 1835; spelling and capitalization in original.

⁶⁷⁶ See, for example, “An Angel Caught,” January 29, 1835, 102; “An Angel Caught,” June 25, 1835, 3; “Capture of a Mormon Angel,” June 27, 1835, 3; “An Angel Caught,” July 18, 1835; “An Angel Caught!,” 4.

staggering portion of editors throughout the United States, the shaping of a mischievous, dishonest Mormon prophet. It is significant that agenda setting was happening on a national level, not simply by disgruntled neighbors. It also shows the insurmountable task Mormons assumed to correct the image being shaped of them.

Smith's contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville, described this American phenomenon: "When a great number of the organs of the press adopt the same line of conduct, and their influence becomes irresistible; and public opinion, when it is perpetually assailed from the same side, eventually yields to the attack."⁶⁷⁷ According to Tocqueville, the influence of nineteenth-century print culture on the minds of American readers was unmatched. Editors' agendas shaped an indelible perception of Mormons that they could not combat.

Change

Editors' agenda-setting also took the form of changing any positive impressions of the Mormons. One influential tool for this agenda was critical first-person letters that were, by nature of their firsthand observations, incontrovertible. Ohio editors more than one hundred miles from Kirtland reproduced a series of letters by the apostate Ezra Booth in 1831 and 1832. The effect caused some of the faithful to worry that such a coloring and appearance of falsehood meant Mormonism would be overthrown by them.⁶⁷⁸ The fallout was sufficient that Smith and leading brethren stopped their Kirtland labors to go on missions to quell the effects among those in the surrounding area who might have had

⁶⁷⁷ de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1875, 1:187.

⁶⁷⁸ See Palmer, "Brother O. Cowdery," 61–62. For more on Ezra Booth's letters, see Rowley, "The Ezra Booth Letters."

positive or even neutral associations with the Mormons but whose opinions had changed because of Booth's letters.

Additional lengthy epistles were suitable to the agenda of changing mindsets about the Mormons. One such letter, which when typeset was the equivalent of twenty-one modern double-spaced pages, circulated through the exchange in July 1836 in no fewer than fourteen papers in seven states. Its topics varied widely but editors found the eyewitness account of Mormon scenes of "wild, frantic, horrible fanaticism" to suit their agenda of changing even neutral perspectives for the worst. The letter possessed the ideal evidences against the Mormons who were seen by the writer to prostrate themselves lifeless on the ground in spiritual stupors, while others were taken in fits of rolling around in grimaced, contorted bodies, or creeping up on imaginary persons to knock down, scalp, and rip open the bowels in feats of Indian warfare.⁶⁷⁹

Direct

Editors began to direct the trajectory of Mormonism in Ohio with their skillful development of the agenda of vilification. The first stage was identifying the enemy. More than name-calling or taunting, Identification of the Enemy required editors to create an "us" and "them" through carefully selected vocabulary. For example, editors of no fewer than seventeen articles in the exchange in 1833 across Ohio, Pennsylvania, Arkansas Territory, New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Delaware, and Washington City defined themselves against the opposition by characterizing the Mormons as "wretched zealots" who, as a group, "cordially unite in detesting all, save

⁶⁷⁹ Montium, "Mormonism."

Mormons.”⁶⁸⁰ Portraying a people with a prejudiced animosity against outsiders incited the same exclusionary reaction on the opposite side.

The second stage, Portrayal of the Adversary, went a step further and calcified the separation of foes by incorporating the binary struggle between good and evil into the two identities. Editors regularly accomplished this stage of their vilifying agenda each time they sketched Mormon deceit. Whether it was the Mormon preoccupation with performing miracles, seeing visions, receiving proprietary communication from God, or starting a banking establishment that suspiciously failed almost immediately, Mormon deception necessitated an equal and opposite defender of truth. It was a call to rally the American citizen against the evils of Mormonism.

Third in the vilification stages is Attributing Diabolical Motives to the darkly painted foe. The enemy is imbued with unconscionable motives to harm sacred trusts, beloved ideologies, and dear relations. One example that originated in Vermont was villagers fighting an outbreak of smallpox but who had “been hindered by a sect calling themselves Mormonites who profess to believe that the disorder will not attack them, neither would they spread it,” though one had contracted the terrifying disease.⁶⁸¹ The blatant Mormon disregard described by editors strengthened their agenda of vilifying the Mormons as a callused people with utter contempt for life. Those who reproduced the article pushed the classification further so it was a matter of Mormon “*predatory*

⁶⁸⁰ “Mormons,” January 3, 1833, 1.

⁶⁸¹ “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” May 24, 1833. See also “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” May 25, 1833, 2; “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” May 30, 1833, 3; “Mormonism and the Small Pox,” June 4, 1833, 2.

habits.”⁶⁸² Editors set the agenda of a Mormon villain by which they intended to direct readers’ emotions against the diabolical enemy.

Lastly, an opponent’s power must be carefully magnified to provoke movement against it or to prevent its advance. Editors used statistics of the growing Mormon populace to direct public minds against the spreading “reign of Mormonism.”⁶⁸³ Mormon domination over the unwary or the numerical power to sway politics brought with it an intolerable violation of American liberties. A national preoccupation with the Mormon villain boiled over locally in Kirtland in 1837. The aggression was heated by the matter of the Mormon bank, which was found in an unprecedented eighty-six articles in twelve states (of twenty-six in the Union), twenty-two cities, and in twenty-nine newspapers from December 1836 to December 1837. Editors’ agendas had created, shaped, changed, and sequentially vilified the Mormons with such acuity that they directed the Mormon trajectory out of Kirtland to the plains of northwestern Missouri.

Mormon Efforts

The power and influence of the press on Smith’s church and followers is evident in their perpetual effort to establish a Mormon press despite impoverishment and mobbing. The effectiveness of non-Mormon agendas against them created a national atmosphere wherein not a day passed during the Kirtland years that Mormons throughout the country did not scan papers front-to-back for what news was projected about them

⁶⁸² “Mormonism,” August 17, 1833; italics in original. The article was taken from a nonextant issue of the *Wilmington State Journal*.

⁶⁸³ November 15, 1833, 2. The article was reprinted from a nonextant *Bangor Courier*.

and which necessitated a posture of constant self-defense. Within the texts produced by the Mormons, I identified and classified four agendas: to dispel, correct, or offset incorrect perceptions; relay church doctrines and structure; unify scattered members; and portray a persecuted people.

Create

The Mormons rejoiced at the prospect of creating their own printed perceptions of themselves with their first press established in 1832 in Missouri, distant though it was from Smith in Kirtland. It was with satisfaction that Mormons saw their printed agendas to introduce themselves as a religion, unify scattered church members, and standardize church organization republished in non-Mormon exchange papers. The *Ohio Atlas*, printed in Elyria, Ohio, reprinted an announcement from a nonextant Rhode Island paper that said, “we are in the receipt of the second number ... of that most absurd and singular sect. It is ... handsomely printed ... [and] the first page is devoted to the revelations from the Prophet Mormon, and Extracts from the laws for the Government of the church.”⁶⁸⁴ Despite the unfavorable classification, Mormons were pleased their introductory efforts had been noticed. They may have temporarily thought they would be accepted by their peers or, at the least, would be able to broadcast their agendas according to their plans for their trajectory.

⁶⁸⁴ “Mormonism,” October 11, 1832, 2; capitalization in original; see also “Mormonism,” May 11, 1833, 2.

Shape

Smith's peculiar doctrines separated his religion from the standard American religious fare. For example, his vision of multiple heavens was published in their first paper under the agenda to relay church doctrines and out of a naïve excitement to shape the Mormon theological identity.⁶⁸⁵ The reception of the revisionist view of heaven and hell both in and out of the Church was, however, less than enthusiastic even among Smith's flock in Kirtland. The attention and results of the printed spread of the vision soon began to turn against its revealer. American editors were not fond of the fanciful postmortal embellishments. No fewer than thirteen newspapers across five states and the Arkansas territory took exception to the doctrine and the Mormon editor who was so brash as to declare that the vision was "the greatest news that was ever published to man—showing the economy of God in prepairing mansions for men."⁶⁸⁶ The precept was not so much the issue as the fanatics who now had a press to propagate it. The thorny results caused Smith to recalculate the position of the vision and to counsel missionaries not to discuss it when proselytizing, an unwelcomed result of shaping Mormonism's identity through its unique doctrines.⁶⁸⁷ Mormon printing almost immediately returned mixed results on their agenda to shape their identity.

The Mormons also discovered a painful but forceful avenue for shaping their

⁶⁸⁵ See "A Vision," 10–11.

⁶⁸⁶ "Mormonism," September 22, 1832, 1; spelling in original; see also "Mormonism," October 2, 1832, 2; "Mormonism," October 11, 1832, 2; "Mormonism," May 11, 1833, 2.

⁶⁸⁷ See "History, 1838-1856, Volume B-1 [1 September 1834-2 November 1838]," 762.

image in Mormon print. It began as they turned the destruction of their first press in Missouri in July 1833 to their advantage as soon as they established their second press in Kirtland in December 1833. The mobbing and violence against them provided emotional evidence with which to accomplish their agenda of shaping the image of a persecuted Mormon people to American readers. The inaugural issue of the new paper began that shaping with unmistakable pathos: “It has become our duty to relate one of the most shocking scenes, which has disgraced the character of any citizen of the United States, since her freedom was purchased by the shedding of blood.” The Mormon editor continued with what occupied nearly half of the sixteen-page issue and what would become a serialized history of the persecution by relating “the proceedings of an innocent people, who have been widely persecuted and slandered.”⁶⁸⁸ It was a meaningful manner of shaping a sympathy-winning identity, one which non-Mormon editors feared, such as one Ohio paper warned: “Persecution but adds to their numbers.”⁶⁸⁹ The shaping traversed the country. A paper in Rhode Island captured an Illinois exchange epigram: “Persecution judiciously administered may give them consequence hereafter.”⁶⁹⁰ The report lamented sixty new converts. Smith and the Mormons never hesitated to shape a suffering identity.

⁶⁸⁸ Cowdery, “To the Patrons of the Evening and the Morning Star,” 226.

⁶⁸⁹ “Mormons,” *Western Courier*, October 10, 1833, 3.

⁶⁹⁰ “Mormonism,” *Rhode-Island Republican*, October 9, 1833, 2.

Change

Mormon printers were eager to avail themselves of a compelling opportunity to change the deepening perception of them set by American editors and incorporate it into their own paper. It was the rare occasion of positive printed assessments of outside observers, particularly editors. S. A. Davis, editor of the *Glad Tidings and Ohio Christian Telescope* (printed in both Pennsylvania and Ohio), provided one such opportunity. “I have seldom, if ever, been treated with greater kindness by any denomination of Christians, or seen manifested more liberality of sentiment and Christian charity, than by the ‘Latter Day Saints,’ during my visit among them.” The chance for Mormon editors to change American opinion was worth reprinting Davis’s entire 140-line report despite its occasional light scoffing at them. Likewise, the Mormon editor felt confident that Davis’s disbelief in their tenets strengthened his compliments.

On the whole, our visit to Kirtland, was a pleasant one, and notwithstanding I am as far from believing their doctrine as any person can be, yet I must say that they manifested a spirit of liberality, and Christianity, which many of their bitterest persecutors would do well to imitate.⁶⁹¹

The Mormons reciprocated the compliment and waited to see if American opinions changed as a result of his observations.

Direct

Mormon printers were faced with a dire need to direct their trajectory at the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society bank in 1837, which dominated Mormon thought and became a primary focus of their printing. January and March issues of the *Messenger and Advocate* devoted a combined 696 lines to the topic of persecution, which the

⁶⁹¹ April 1837, 489–90.

Mormons claimed created an atmosphere of imminent failure. The editor castigated the un-American, obviously anti-First Amendment opposition that proved “there is not a State in this UNION, where a man is at liberty to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience.”⁶⁹² Perhaps if the Mormon printers were forceful enough, they could redirect the blame to the deserving editors whose “base lies which they have made and circulated in order to stop the progress of the truth.”⁶⁹³

Further efforts to direct Smith and his coadjutors out of the difficulties included implicating the country at large. “We speak not of these as calamities peculiar to our little town. We mention them because they are common to our whole country, and because causes of a similar nature have combined to produce nearly the same effect throughout our whole country.”⁶⁹⁴ Ultimately, their most forceful means of an evasive trajectory for Smith and other leaders was to implicate foolish followers. Of the leadership, the Mormon paper was clear: “We are not bankers, bank stock holders, or financiers,”⁶⁹⁵ and those guilty of such blind following were unworthy of “the name of a freeman, who thus tamely surrenders, the rights the privileges, and immunities of an independent citizen.”⁶⁹⁶ Despite the Mormon agenda to direct itself out of culpability, the printed efforts fell flat, and readers appeared to remain convinced that Smith was a moral enemy of American well-being.

⁶⁹² Rigdon, “PERSECUTION,” 436; capitalization and emphases in original.

⁶⁹³ S. R., “PERSECUTION,” 479; punctuation updated for readability.

⁶⁹⁴ June 1837, 522; punctuation updated for readability.

⁶⁹⁵ “Kirtland, Ohio, July, 1837,” 536, 539; spelling in original.

⁶⁹⁶ “Kirtland, Ohio, July, 1837,” 538, 540.

The Mormon trajectory was not their own. Their nature was being shaped by outward forces and they could not control their image created by hundreds of newspapers beyond their grasp and influence. The late arrival of the Mormon press to the printing party made it virtually impossible for Mormons to catch up to the hundreds of editors who had already sharpened the delivery of their agenda-setting for years. The tide of opinion was beyond the ability of their agendas to shape or change what was already ingrained in the public mind. Mormon editors also faced the reality that their articles were not reproduced throughout the exchange in any degree comparable to the frequency that non-Mormon editorials were replicated. The Kirtland years began a powerful lesson reiterated time and again over the next nearly two centuries as succeeding Mormon leaders continued to learn to tightly control the publication of agendas and images of Mormonism.⁶⁹⁷ Effects of this lesson are evident in the establishment of an office of LDS Public Affairs and an authoritative church Newsroom, “the official resource for news media, opinion leaders and the public.”⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁷ The Mormons would have to wait until the 1920s and 1930s to see consistently more positive media portrayals of their faith. For examples of the perception of Mormonism in the media following the timeframe of this dissertation, see Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons*, chap. 2; Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); J. Spencer Fluhman, “*A Peculiar People*”: *Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶⁹⁸ See “LDS News | Mormon News - Official Newsroom of the Church,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org>. The online newsroom provides authorized images and videos and prepared statements that can be used by media outlets.

*What does early Mormon history teach us about
the atmosphere of print culture in America?*

This cultural history of Mormonism during its Ohio years brought to light a number of insights about the atmosphere of print culture in America not as easily seen without the quantity or reach of the articles of my collection or an analysis such as mine of a specific American entity.

For example, an early question about nineteenth-century print culture that arose while I coded and calculated percentages of each editorial tone (critical, neutral, positive, sympathetic) was why the largest percentages of editors' tones were consistently critical. Was it easier for editors to find and print negative commentary on Mormonism than positive—a snowballing effect of sorts where increasing numbers of critical articles increased the likelihood that editors would find and reprint critical articles because that was what was most likely to be found? Or, was it because negative print sold better? In other words, were Americans more interested in the corrupt, scandalous, bizarre, and immoral than in the positive and inspiring? I am convinced that the answer to each query is yes. Nineteenth-century Americans were as fascinated with the fantastic and gruesome as today. This was evidenced by the range of topics I read about in the newspapers including the development of the penny press in the 1830s, the phenomenon of trial by newspaper, political partisanship, moral warring (e.g., abolition, temperance, etc.), and philanthropy.⁶⁹⁹ The freedoms of speech, press, and of religion were also part of the

⁶⁹⁹ The “penny press” began in the 1830s when printing advancements (the cylinder press) reduced the cost of manufacturing newspapers so papers could be sold for a penny instead of the standard six cents. Editors discovered the new class of readers, the working class, were not interested in the high society fare typical of subscription-based newspapers, but preferred stories of crimes and intrigue. See George Henry Payne, *History of Journalism in the United States* (New York: D. Appleton and Company,

multifaceted printing atmosphere, the extent of which had to be delimited from this dissertation but merit further study.

As my exploration of the articles continued, I wondered if editors truly believed there was an evil associated with the sect. Was it of a spiritual nature where souls were at stake? The answer depended on the newspaper. On one end of the spectrum, religious periodicals did express a concern for the loss of souls who abandoned traditional beliefs for those of an unknown God and prophet Smith. In the middle was the overwhelming majority of American newspapers that were not affiliated with any specific denomination and were less interested in one's eternal progression. And at the opposite end of the spectrum, were those bent on proving religion a fraud. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine which editors were most likely to vilify the Mormons (or any religion) and why, though it would be a fascinating insight into the atmosphere of the antebellum print culture. What was clearly evident was that the nonreligious considered Mormonism yet another farce among the many schemes that plagued the country to dupe followers financially or induce other harms such as swaying elections in favor of loyalties to an unprovable supreme influence.

Another enlightening and fascinating facet of the nineteenth-century print atmosphere in which the Mormons existed was the printed dialogues between and among newspapers. Anyone or anything that evoked strong feelings in an editor—including

1920), chap. XVIII. The previously discussed Robert Matthews, alias Matthias, the case of the fanatical religionist who was tried in New York for the murder of one of his followers, is an example of "trial by newspaper." The affair "instantly became a scandal of unprecedented proportions" due to its manner of publication. Matthias was acquitted for the murder charge but the reading public was convinced of his guilt because of what they read. Johnson and Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias*, 145.

politicians, national financial concerns, slavery, or Mormonism—often provoked a response from another editor. Although there were a few instances of editors recognizing the opinions of another with which they agreed, more common was the printed back-and-forth arguments. This became particularly relevant as Mormon and non-Mormon editors reacted to each other's agendas. As Mormon editors gained more experience and the longer they printed, the more often they responded to non-Mormon commentary. The Mormon agenda of emphasizing their industry and common citizenry with their countrymen caused them to reprint favorable non-Mormon articles and express their appreciation for such "gentlemen, of liberal minds, of correct republican principles."⁷⁰⁰

Mormon editors, however, more often expressed displeasure and indignation at the frivolous and false agendas printed against them. The degree of impact of an antagonistic agenda is indicated by the quantity, quality, and amount and frequency of repetition of text used to respond to the opposing editor. At the same time, an editor's agendas are clarified, in this case, the Mormon agendas, by taking note of which articles they chose to respond to in their newspaper and which they did not. A multitude of pressures from the contemporary print culture influenced such decisions and, in turn, shaped the printing atmosphere.

The findings regarding the Mormons' careful selection of which articles and editors merited responses and to what degree shows a people, leadership, and editorship constantly aware of the widening spread of agendas that were creating a Mormon persona fearfully out-of-reach to their own truth. The cultural history drawn from Mormonism in the Kirtland years demonstrated that the Mormon experience can be generalized to other

⁷⁰⁰ April 1837, 489–90.

persons, peoples, politics, and practices who likewise pored over thousands of subscriptions for information about themselves and postured and repostured themselves accordingly. The culture of print for Americans fed a news-hungry people whose interests, concerns, and entertainment were served every day in the major mass medium of the time, the newspapers.

American editors were unencumbered by the shackles of modern-day precedent in their practice of free press, and the opportunity and ability to procure a press proffered the opportunity and ability to manipulate not just local minds, but national public opinion per their own penchants. Whether their objectives and biases were philanthropic, financial, political, Deistic, atheistic, orthodoxic, dogmatic, or merely antagonistic, the culture of free press of the early 1800s granted unfettered access to and influence of a not-so-united citizenry. The only restraint to the highly transitive nature of nineteenth-century majorities and minorities was the physical might of a centralized local opposition, as demonstrated by blockades of abolitionist literature, gag orders for congressional bills, or brickbats and tar and feathers for nefarious neighbors.

American print culture was dynamic, fickle, influential, full of agenda-setting, and tempestuous. Nothing was spared its clutch and no “truth” or people went unexamined. No subject was too sacred or mundane for explication and multiplication through the exchange. Americans exulted in these argumentative freedoms at the same time they recoiled if they found themselves within printed crosshairs.

Early Mormon history also teaches an important facet of the nineteenth-century print atmosphere, the likelihood of the impact of an editor’s agenda on a reader as explicated in the Agenda Setting Theory term, “Obtrusiveness.” Founding theorist

Maxwell McCombs described how Obtrusiveness, the degree a topic obtrudes into one's life and personal relevance of an issue, influences the effectiveness of media's agenda setting. The deeper the obtrusiveness, the stronger the impact. Obtrusiveness was highest among Mormonism's most immediate neighbors as the beliefs, practices, and people obtruded into those lives in close physical proximity. However, the advertisement of the husband abandoned by his wife for Mormonism was a warning that the beliefs could obtrude at any distance.⁷⁰¹

The rise of Mormonism is a case study well-suited for another of Agenda Setting's theoretical claims, "Need for Orientation," and its implications to nineteenth-century print culture. If one needs orientation into a subject, the theory explains, the media have a greater likelihood of setting the agenda because they are the source of orienting information.⁷⁰² Whereas Mormonism was a new phenomenon in the 1830s, its existence and growth in the Kirtland years occurred in a virtual blank slate and the nation as a whole was forced to form some opinion on the new entity. The agenda-setting atmosphere of nineteenth-century print culture filled the need—though without a claim or expectation of editorial objectivity that would become a trademark of journalism beginning in the early twentieth century. Thus, early Mormon history teaches us that the nineteenth-century freedom to print was the uncontested power to propagate perspectives with the only necessary disclaimer being, "Important if true."⁷⁰³ Well did Tocqueville

⁷⁰¹ See "Caution," 3.

⁷⁰² See McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*, 64–65.

⁷⁰³ See, for example, "Important If True," *Observer and Telegraph*, June 16, 1831, col. e.

declare, “Nothing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same moment.” Moreover, “The effect of a newspaper is not only to suggest the same purpose to a great number of persons, but also to furnish means for executing in common the designs which they may have singly conceived.”⁷⁰⁴ The majority of Americans whose need for orientation about the Mormons was high were decidedly likely to adopt the agendas perpetuated by the atmosphere of print culture.

This cultural history of Mormonism from 1831 to 1837 provides valuable insights into these facets of the nineteenth-century print culture. The patterns of agenda setting and vilification constitute compelling evidence of the controlling atmosphere freedom of the press and print culture in America inflicted on its populace.

Cultural History

“The task of cultural history,” explained foundational journalism historian James W. Carey, is the “recovery of past forms of imagination, of historical consciousness.” Newspapers, replete with the agenda-setting purposes of their editors, taken in their raw stream of consciousness, elucidate “the particular constellation of attitudes, emotions, motives and expectations that were experienced” in and around the acts they describe.⁷⁰⁵ Carey challenged historians to explore the consciousness of historical actors as opposed to merely chronicling facts and organizational progression. My study responds to Carey’s call to investigate the consciousness of historical actors, particularly concerning religion

⁷⁰⁴ de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840, 2:119.

⁷⁰⁵ Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” Spring 1974, 4.

in the press,⁷⁰⁶ by its examination of newspapers in the Kirtland era that demonstrated the rich, detailed spectrum of editors' agendas about Mormonism and in which Smith and the Mormons functioned. It addresses the understudied repository of the perception of reality located in newspapers in which historical figures existed.

Yale's Department of History asserts that "cultural history brings to life a past time and place [through] objects and experiences of everyday life."⁷⁰⁷ This study of newspapers in the Mormon Kirtland era was a fertile field of 1830's everyday experiences from which I brought to life the national dialogue about Mormonism that occurred in the pages of newspapers across the country. I brought to life the fear and paranoia, the skepticism, and the disdain Americans held for a new religious movement that their precious liberties engendered. I brought to life the hopeful desires to settle and practice religion as per those First Amendment rights and the exasperation and contempt when the privileges were warped and denied. I also brought to life the ability to create a social villain deserving of aggression by means of its calculated rhetoric. Thus, this cultural history reclaims an element of the past unexplored to this point in nineteenth-century American, religious, communication, and Mormon studies. It offers to past and current discussions an invaluable window into the lives and thoughts of antebellum Americans through its discerning of patterns and trends in attitudes and behavior and their relationships⁷⁰⁸ in the agendas of editors that were consolidated and illuminated by

⁷⁰⁶ See Carey, "Preface."

⁷⁰⁷ "Cultural History."

⁷⁰⁸ See Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*, 10.

Agenda Setting and Vilification Theories.

Communication professor Jerry W. Knudson noted that history “is concerned—or should be concerned—not only with what actually happened in any given time or place, but also with what people *thought* was happening, as revealed to them through the means of mass communication, which may have conditioned their subsequent actions.”

Therefore, what was filtered through the press may have changed the historical outcome.⁷⁰⁹ I have taken up this scholarly conversation by addressing gaps in communication and religious studies with the examination of Mormon printing and their reactions to the attitudes, emotions, and motives that non-Mormon editors set before their readers, which revealed the deep frustration Mormons bore because of the actions that resulted from such perceptions.

Future Research

I expected at the prospectus for this dissertation to find a large but manageable amount of printed material about and by the Mormons for the original focus of the years 1829-1844 that would include three to four books of Mormon scripture, a dozen or so Mormon missionary pamphlets, and the runs of five Mormon newspapers. It appeared that scholars had identified a few hundred non-Mormon newspaper articles on Mormonism from which I would identify aspects pertaining to the research questions. However, as I began the research, I was wholly unprepared for what I would discover, nor could any doctoral advisor or scholar have guessed what was in store.

What resulted from over two years of research was a personal collection and

⁷⁰⁹ Jerry W. Knudson, “Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources,” *American Historical Association Perspectives*, October 1993, para. 4; italics in original.

highly detailed record of approximately eleven thousand non-Mormon newspaper articles in PDF format from more than 630 newspapers from the first fifteen years of Mormonism. And while drafting this dissertation, I found yet another digital archive of newspapers that may yield another thirteen thousand articles on Mormonism published during its first decade and a half. These discoveries reaffirm that history is constantly being revised, rewritten, and reinterpreted as the accessibility of artifacts increases. The perpetually expanding scope of these thousands of texts presents exciting new gaps and a host of possibilities to reengage the past as anthropologist Marilyn Strathern said: “We need to go precisely where we have already been, back to the immediate here and now out of which we have created our present knowledge of the world.”⁷¹⁰ This dovetails with my desire to continue to contribute to the areas of research outlined earlier in this dissertation, which are already creating interest among scholars.

To date, I have presented research at two different conferences and at a historical symposium, and co-published an article in *American Journalism*.⁷¹¹ An essay about the early reception of the Book of Mormon in nineteenth-century America was published in a book associated with the 44th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium at Brigham Young University.⁷¹² Most recently, I presented a conference paper at the Mormon Historical

⁷¹⁰ Marilyn Strathern, *Property, Substance, and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 25; see also Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 31–32.

⁷¹¹ See Mangun and Chatelain, “For ‘The Cause of Civil and Religious Liberty’: Abner Cole and the Palmyra, New York, Reflector.”

⁷¹² See Chatelain, “The Early Reception of the Book of Mormon in Nineteenth-Century America.”

Association (MHA) on Mormon agenda setting in their Nauvoo, Illinois, *Times and Seasons* from 1839 to 1842.⁷¹³ I plan to revise the paper and submit it to the *Journal of Mormon History* upon completion of the dissertation.

These presentations and publications are just the beginning of a robust research agenda based on ideas that arose while I was immersed in the artifacts. For example, I discovered regular reference to the followers of William Miller, who had twice predicted when Christ's Second Coming would occur and who was criticized when Christ did not appear. I plan to contrast the treatment of the Millerites and the Mormons in the newspapers, and also use Vilification Theory to analyze printed tactics used against the Millerites. I plan to distill my findings on editors' treatment of the violence perpetuated against the Mormons in Jackson County, Missouri, in 1833-34 into a journal article, which will provide missing context for extant studies. Also, I would like to examine nineteenth-century printers' punctuation and emphases using T. C. Hansard's *Typographia: An Historical Sketch of the Origin and Progress of the Art of Printing*, which became interesting as editors emphasized their agendas. And, I intend to revisit the original idea of the dissertation, an examination of free speech and freedom of the press as it related to Mormon printing in the nineteenth century. It is an exciting time to be a communication historian.

⁷¹³ See Jeremy J. Chatelain, "The Practice and Practicing of Mormon Agenda Setting in the Times and Seasons, 1839-1842" (Mormon History Association 51st Annual Conference, Snowbird, UT, 2016).

Current Implications

Smith and his followers learned from Mormonism's birth and adolescence the indispensable place of the press. No effort was too great or expense unworthy to gain the swaying power of print. The Mormon story, however, did not end with Kirtland. Journalism historian Barbara Cloud observed, "The Mormons have a history with strong newspaper links. At each of the locations where they tried to build a colony, they started newspapers."⁷¹⁴ Smith's death in 1844 inaugurated the next Mormon migration to the Utah territory under the leadership of the indefatigable Brigham Young. As with Smith in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, one of Young's early priorities in the initial relative safety of exile in the Great Salt Lake Valley was to acquire a press for the Mormons' newest colony. Saints, said Young, could only be saved in intelligence, which could only be had through the press. Young sent W. W. Phelps, the first Mormon printer, back to Illinois to purchase and transport a press to the valley. The next Utah Mormon newspaper, the *Deseret News*, started publication in 1850, only three years after their arrival.⁷¹⁵

Agenda setting and vilification about and by the Mormons continued for the next century and a half as Mormonism grew into a worldwide faith. And it is evident in current coverage that sparks immediate and vehement criticism and reaction such as in the death of Latter-day Saint Church President Thomas S. Monson in early 2018.⁷¹⁶ The *New York Times*'s Robert D. McFadden, senior writer on the Obituaries desk, published a

⁷¹⁴ Cloud, *The Coming of the Frontier Press: How the West Was Really Won*, 139.

⁷¹⁵ See Cloud, 139–41.

⁷¹⁶ Monson died at age 90 after serving as president of the Church for approximately ten years and in the second-highest governing body since 1963.

news obituary on Monson on January 3, 2018, that addressed Monson's refusal to ordain women as priests and alter church opposition to same-sex marriage.⁷¹⁷

Five days later, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported on an online petition signed by “tens of thousands of Mormons ... to show their outrage over the tone” of the obituary. The petition's instigator, Nathan Cunningham, a Mormon from Nevada, accused the *Times* of the agenda of using the obituary “to attack and disparage [Monson's] character ... [and] as a political statement against him and the [LDS Church] as a whole.” Cunningham's evidence of the vilifying agenda was the death of communist leader Fidel Castro and *Playboy* magnate Hugh Hefner, both of whom were given “more neutral obituaries, which shows this either as a direct attack or a complete misunderstanding of religions or religious people.... Would they write similar scathing remarks about the pope?” The *Tribune's* article included a response from the obituary's editor who discussed the obligation of journalists to “fully air these issues from both sides.” It was not an agenda against Monson or the Church, but a responsible portrayal of “the public man, not the private one.”⁷¹⁸

Nevertheless, the online petition on the webpage *change.org* continued to gain signatures and notoriety in the press. More than one hundred thousand names appeared

⁷¹⁷ See Robert D. McFadden, “Thomas Monson, President of the Mormon Church, Dies at 90,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/obituaries/thomas-monson-dies.html>.

⁷¹⁸ Bob Mims, “Change Your Slanted Monson Obituary, Tens of Thousands of Mormons Urge The New York Times,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/local/2018/01/08/change-your-slanted-monson-obituary-tens-of-thousands-of-mormons-urge-the-new-york-times/>.

on it by the date of the *Tribune*'s article⁷¹⁹ and hundreds of online comments were posted in both the *New York Times* Reader Center and on the webpage of the *Salt Lake Tribune*'s story—a stark contrast to the months and years Mormons in Kirtland had to wait to counteract such publicity. The *Times* defended its approach to the obituary without conceding an agenda. “We’re not in the business of paying tribute. We’re journalists first and foremost.... We don’t write tributes. We strive for warts-and-all biography.” The respondent then accused the petitioners: “Some may have an agenda of some kind, wanting us to portray someone as they want that person to be remembered, perhaps in a light that best serves their interests. We can’t bend to that, of course.”⁷²⁰

When accessing the *New York Times* obituary and rejoinder online, I was immediately presented a pop-up before being allowed to proceed to the articles. It was the *Times*'s slogan in boldface type: “The truth has power./The truth will not be threatened./The truth has a voice./The New York Times.” Similarly, the advertising banner across the top of the webpage that consumed approximately one-fourth of the screen in bold, typical advertising colors and fonts displayed: “The strength of facts./The power of truth./Reporting stories you can trust.” The power of the *New York Times*'s truth and strength of their facts could be purchased for the discounted price of \$9.99 a

⁷¹⁹ See Morgan Jones, “New York Times Obits Editor Responds to Criticism of President Monson’s Obituary,” *Deseret News*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/900007122/new-york-times-obits-editor-responds-to-criticism-of-president-monsons-obituary.html>.

⁷²⁰ Lara Takenaga, “Our Obituaries Editor on Coverage of Former Mormon Leader Thomas Monson,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/08/reader-center/thomas-monson-obituary.html>.

month.⁷²¹

Whereas the pop-ups and banner precede access to content, another of the *Times*'s agendas is clear: everything it publishes is *truth*. And, as in the nineteenth century, journalists continue to select details to emphasize or downplay according to individual and agency agendas. While clarifying Monson's public person status, the editor reminded readers that controversy comes with such leadership territory, "and to a large extent controversy, points of friction of some sort, is what makes news.... So an obituary—which in many respects retells the news of yesterday—is going to recall controversies, as it should."⁷²²

On January 10, 2018, the *National Review*, a conservative editorial magazine founded by author William F. Buckley Jr. in 1955, questioned the *Times*'s agenda. The *Review* published an article written by Hal Boyd, guest columnist and the opinion editor for the Mormon-owned *Deseret News*. Boyd criticized the *Times* for "weakening the moral authority of the very causes it so eagerly seeks to advance" with its style of the obituary that "undermined the pluralistic ideals that progressive papers, such as the *Times*, tout as their goal." Boyd found interest in a tweet by the *Times*'s own former executive editor, Jill Abramson, who was perplexed about the *Times*'s approach: "Been trying to figure out all day how the @nytimes justified this framing of the Mormon

⁷²¹ See McFadden, "Thomas Monson, President of the Mormon Church, Dies at 90." As with all other webpage content used in this dissertation, I converted the webpages to PDF and have stored them to protect against Internet attrition.

⁷²² Takenaga, "Our Obituaries Editor on Coverage of Former Mormon Leader Thomas Monson."

prophet's obituary."⁷²³ Abramson had retweeted the statement by McKay Coppins, staff writer for *The Atlantic* and noted as one of the "ten breakout reporters of 2012."⁷²⁴ As was noted in the Kirtland era with its back-and-forth surveillance and commentary, agendas and counter-agendas over Mormonism are replicated through the media today but with the speed of electronic journalism. And, individuals, including those who comprise Mormon membership, now have a voice in the digital media with a variety of public platforms in which to post and publish their myriad agendas, an ability not available to members in Smith's day.

The Mormon leadership's agenda of disseminating a positive Mormon image showed careful, practiced distance from the *New York Times* agenda and even that of its disgruntled members who were signing the petition or publishing their views in other venues. The Church's official newsroom made no mention of the dialogues.⁷²⁵ Surely the LDS Church has learned to avoid the public relations fallout that would come from

⁷²³ Hal Boyd, "The Progressive Art of Shaming Mormons," *National Review*, January 10, 2018, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/455293/thomas-s-monson-new-york-times-obituary-anti-mormonism>; spelling and grammar in original. The *Review* reported that the petition had reached nearly two hundred thousand signatories.

⁷²⁴ Dylan Byers, "10 Breakout Political Reporters of 2012 - Dylan Byers," POLITICO, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/84147.html>; see also McKay Coppins, "Been Trying to Figure out All Day How the @nytimes Justified This Framing of the Mormon Prophet's Obituary.https://Twitter.Com/Nytimes/Status/948582103104589826 ...," Tweet, @mckaycoppins (blog), January 9, 2018, <https://twitter.com/mckaycoppins/status/948793583125004289>.

⁷²⁵ The only LDS Church commentary on the *New York Times* incident was reported in its public news agency, the *Deseret News*, which maintains the official agendas of the Church. The article was a straightforward recitation of the "scrutiny on social media" of the *New York Times* including a reprint of the controversial doctrines in question, statements from the petition's originator, and the *Times*'s refutation. Jones, "New York Times Obits Editor Responds to Criticism of President Monson's Obituary."

tangling with a national icon such as the *New York Times*. The Church had, nevertheless, created a webpage to set its agenda on its own terms. The webpage is entitled “President Monson’s Service by the Numbers” and boasts a tally of Monson’s accomplishments during his life’s work.⁷²⁶ The Church published nineteen additional articles on Monson’s philanthropy and achievement in its news venues in the three weeks following his death.⁷²⁷ The modern-day LDS Church agenda to create and shape Mormon identity in a positive light is as clear as any of the 1830s efforts by Smith but with more than 180 years of practice.

Nevertheless, the complete mastery of the LDS Church of its agenda regarding the Mormon image was broken by a fissure in the self-defense agenda of individual members, as was pointed out by George Pyle, the *Salt Lake Tribune*’s editorial page editor. Pyle noted that Mormon petition signers’ offense was not because of any inaccuracy in the *Times*’s reporting or vilification purposes, but because the issues of same-sex marriage and the ordination of women “are not the things about the church that they [individual Mormons] are most proud of. They’d rather not talk about [them].” If the members were as confident of and “comfortable” with Mormon identity as, apparently,

⁷²⁶ Among the examples the Church used to demonstrate Monson’s lifetime of service was his serving on the National Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America for more than forty-eight years and receiving international Scouting’s highest recognitions, as well as the Church providing \$1.89 billion in humanitarian aid in 189 countries from 1985 to 2016. See “President Monson’s Service by the Numbers,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, January 5, 2018, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/president-monson-s-service-by-the-numbers>.

⁷²⁷ See “LDS Church News,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.lds.org/church/news?lang=eng>.

was Monson, then the “Times obit wouldn’t be a problem.... They’d wear it.”⁷²⁸

Regardless of individual agendas of its members, the powerful LDS Church public relations arm was already poised with its agenda for its next president, an article published on January 16, 2018: “Get to Know President Russell M. Nelson, a Renaissance Man.”⁷²⁹

As with editors of the nineteenth century, today’s agendas are copied and recopied and posted and reposted but with the replicating power of the electronic age. The tide of billions of tweets, texts, posts, and chats in their unceasing electronic stream, countless news agencies, and media conglomerates establish the social context of “knowledge” about innumerable topics and shape perceptions of majorities and minorities that are as transitory as any of the nineteenth century. And, the media are no less fickle today than they were in the 1800s. Proponents of a purpose quickly find their posture whisked away and repurposed against them.

The agendas of the nineteenth century, particularly those concerning the LDS Church and its interactions with the press, have hardly changed in the last two centuries. Each side sets the agenda for what it intends its readers to think about while criticizing

⁷²⁸ George Pyle, “George Pyle: The Controversy over the New York Times Obituary on Mormon President Monson Says More about the Offended than It Does about the Newspaper,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2018/01/12/george-pyle-ny-times-obituary-of-monson-an-interesting-ink-blot-test/>.

⁷²⁹ See “Get to Know President Russell M. Nelson, a Renaissance Man - Church News and Events,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.lds.org/church/news/get-to-know-president-russell-m-nelson-a-renaissance-man?lang=eng>.

the opposite side's agenda and vilifying its adherents.⁷³⁰ Thus, as sociologist Lester Kurtz remarked, "the academic study of religion provides one valuable approach for a serious study of the dilemmas plaguing modern culture.... Never has the study of religion been more important."⁷³¹ This dissertation and future similar studies can serve to clarify agendas in the media that remain fraught with concerns.

Conclusion

Historians have long understood that "our past [is] a prologue to our present ... [with] its own soul and its own messages to us, worth hearing even now."⁷³² The central message of this historical study is that Kirtland outcomes revealed that attitudes and actions about and by the Mormons were wrought by their portrayal as crafted and set by the agenda of editors. The printed word, if not actually effective, was sufficiently feared to become effective, which resulted in a degree of effectiveness. Kurtz asserted that "all knowledge is shaped by the social context of the knower."⁷³³ In today's media-rich existence, this claim is truer than ever before.

The reality of the fierce competition of agendas and vilification I saw in the astounding replication of articles in the thousands of lines of newspaper text impacted

⁷³⁰ For an award-winning treatise on the Mormon image in the media in recent decades, see Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception*.

⁷³¹ Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*, 1, 5.

⁷³² McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776*, 316.

⁷³³ Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*, x.

me, particularly as a practicing Mormon, more than I expected. These were real people with families striving to find purpose in a country of intense conflict and potential. Their lives were played out in large degree according to the power of the press. Considering this intriguing view into these people's experiences, I find an insightful analogy of historical ethnographer Ann Laura Stoler is fitting:

Watermarks in ... history are indelibly inscribed in past and present. The visibility of watermarks depends on angle and light. Watermarks are embossed on the surface and in the grain.... They denote signatures of a history that neither can be scraped off nor removed without destroying the paper. Watermarks cannot be erased.⁷³⁴

Stoler continued by describing the development of the shaded watermark in 1848 that “provided ‘tonal depth’ by rendering areas ‘in relief.’”⁷³⁵ This distinctive cultural history of Mormonism drawn from the cultural consciousness of newspapers revealed watermarks embossed throughout American religious, political, and print communities, and in personalities and ideologies. The newspapers did not present an objective historical account, nor was that the purpose. The opposite is what was studied—multitonal depths and reliefs of human nature, flaws, fears, and perceptions held up to the lights and lenses of journalism history. Thus, the value and richness of this cultural history did not rely on aseptic narratives, remnants of surviving hegemonic structures, but on the imperfect grains and textures of historical fingerprints that told their own story in fascinating hues and recesses.

Social scientists Hoover and Donovan noted that most human communication

⁷³⁴ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, 8; internal quotation marks removed for readability.

⁷³⁵ Stoler, 8.

occurs in small groups of persons who share common language, experience, and understanding of the world—a “ready-made arena for mutual agreement,” but “not so in a more complex social environment.” Mormonism in the 1830s faced the same volatile question exacerbated in the media throughout the two following centuries and that exists in the complex communication networks of the twenty-first century, “Whose perception is to be believed?” Therein is the necessity of historical studies such as this. Hoover and Donovan were unequivocal: “The need to understand what is happening around us and to share experiences with others makes systematic thought and inquiry essential.”⁷³⁶ British philosopher Karl Popper in his epistemological book *Conjectures and Refutations* agreed, feeling it worthwhile to try to “learn something about the world even if in trying to do so we should merely learn that we do not know much.”⁷³⁷

This qualitative cultural history yielded deeper insights and relationships than could have been anticipated. It verified what theorist Maxwell McCombs said of his Agenda Setting Theory, that it is “a complex intellectual map still in the process of evolving [with] exciting new areas to explore.” The application of Agenda Setting Theory, enriched by specific vilification devices, to a study of nineteenth-century printing atmosphere on a uniquely American religion is surely one of the exciting new areas he encouraged.

⁷³⁶ Kenneth Hoover and Todd Donovan, *The Elements of Social Scientific Thinking*, 10th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011), 4.

⁷³⁷ Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 38.

APPENDIX

Four tonal characteristics used by editors while writing about the Mormons became evident during the methodical reading of the more than one thousand articles used in this study: critical, neutral, positive, and sympathetic. The process by which the articles were categorized and examples of each are as follows.

Critical

Articles coded as critical were recognized primarily by harsh vocabulary consistent throughout the text. The vernacular emphasized Mormon fanaticism, credulity, gullibility, dishonesty, criminality, power, and unscrupulousness. It was seen in some instances as sarcasm and mockery while in others it was as severe as death threats. It manifested itself as intolerance of a variety of facets of Mormonism and outright castigation of Mormon practices and claims. One example is found in the *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME) of September 1831 which was reprinted from a nonextant exchange paper:

MORMONISM. It is certainly strange, yet nevertheless true, but this infatuated people ... are becoming more numerous, and assuming a more formidable appearance. We had hoped, that in this state that believers of the Book of Mormon would have been entirely extinct, and that no individual, however credulous, could be found so blind to reason and common judgment, as to permit himself to be carried away by the absurdities of the Mormon doctrine. The frailties incident to human nature, has in all ages, invariably shown themselves, either in remarkable lethargy, or an enthusiastic excitement unsanctioned by reason or common sense. But the followers of the Book of Mormon ... are amongst the most blind and deluded people we have upon record. They believe that their leader is the real Jesus Christ; and that both he and his disciples have infinite power to work miracles, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers—and they testify that

he has cast out many devils.... To such an enthusiastic pitch have they raised their imaginations that the entreaties and persuasive arguments of friends have no weight whatever. Their religious ceremonies and observances are forms of obscenity and blasphemy and are conducted in a manner shocking to the sense of rational creatures.... They roll naked on the floor, and exhibit a variety of grotesque and unseemly forms, which humanity would blush to name. It is truly lamentable that such a state of things exists—yet nevertheless these fanatics are daily receiving accessions from New York, Indiana, &c.⁷³⁸

Articles labeled critical derided Mormon methods and vilified its leaders, missionaries, and membership. They notably included no discussion of freedom of religion.

Neutral

Texts about the Mormons were considered neutral when the vocabulary and presentation of information maintained neither an overly critical or positive approach to the aspects of Mormonism it reported. For example, the following was reprinted by the *Indiana Palladium* (Lawrence, IN) of March 3, 1835, which it replicated from a nonextant *New York Enquirer*.

Important and decisive, no doubt. A Mormon preacher recently held forth on the “golden bible,” to a large congregation in Franklin county, Md., and after he had gone through, Mr. St. John, a universalist clergyman, rose and replied to him, and set speeches were then made by both the *reverend* gentlemen at each other. When the spiritual bombardiers had spent all their ammunition, a vote was taken in the congregation and a great majority was found on the side of the Mormon. The combatants must have been very sensible personages, and the congregation *remarkably* sensible.⁷³⁹

One will notice the absence of both disparaging and complimentary vocabulary concerning the Mormons. The writer reported neutrally on the interchange and although

⁷³⁸ “Mormonism,” *Eastern Argus*, September 13, 1831, 2; capitalization, emphasis, and spelling in original.

⁷³⁹ “Important and Decisive, No Doubt,” *Indiana Palladium*, March 3, 1835, 2; spelling, capitalization, and emphases in original.

the vote carried in favor of the Mormon, no overt praise or sympathy was used to convey the instance. Neutral articles may have included hints of sarcasm or disbelief but did not criticize in the process.

Positive

Articles with a positive tone were recognized and grouped as they surfaced due to descriptions of admirable attributes of the Mormons such as industriousness, honesty, orderliness, and hospitality. Commentary coded as positive was often first-person narrative about interactions with Mormons or about visits to Mormon towns such as Kirtland. One such example was S. A. Davis, editor of the *Glad Tidings and Ohio Christian Telescope* published simultaneously in Pennsylvania and Ohio, who promised his readers an account of the people and city of the Mormons.

The people would undoubtedly be considered superstitious, and, in some respects, I think they are so; yet I have seldom, if ever, been treated with greater kindness by any denomination of Christians, or seen manifested more liberality of sentiment and Christian charity, than by the 'Latter Day Saints.' ... On the whole, our visit to Kirtland, was a pleasant one, and notwithstanding I am as far from believing their doctrine as any person can be, yet I must say that they manifested a spirit of liberality, and Christianity, which many of their bitterest persecutors would do well to imitate.⁷⁴⁰

Coding an article as positive did not require the writer to accept Mormonism as a legitimate faith but acceded respectable demeanors and favorable characteristics while safeguarding his disbelief.

⁷⁴⁰ Davis, "Kirtland,--Mormonism, &c.," 263.

Sympathetic

The following article is taken from the *Boston Investigator* of December 13, 1833. It was comprised of three exchange paper texts as printed, reprinted, and appended by editors throughout its journey and demonstrates a sympathetic tone. Note that the sympathetic qualification need not exculpate the Mormons from wrongdoing or the peculiarity of doctrines or dogmas. It recognized wrongs committed against the people and often included, as in this example, a recitation of the national liberties and freedoms violated in the violence against the body of rightful believers.

WAR!—‘WAR TO THE KNIFE’S BLADE!’ War within our own borders! —a religious, a persecuting war—a war of extermination on the one side, and on the other, in defence of our altars and our homes, our firesides, our wives and our little ones! God! is there no arm in America to protect the weak in the enjoyment of their religion! and must we in this day of boasted civilization, stand to our arms and fight the intruding persecutor from our doors, and pour out our blood even for an existence in a land of toleration and liberty! Ye who called America an asylum for the persecuted of all religions, where free toleration is extended to every sect and every creed, where the humblest citizen, as well as the proudest, may sit down under his own vine and his own fig tree, to worship his maker after his own conscience, read the following. Blood is flowing upon the free soil of our country!⁷⁴¹

Then followed a more than one full-column transcription of a letter written by the Mormon eyewitness Orson Hyde that described the “ravages” inflicted on the Mormon families. The pleas of the destitute were ignored and “the cries of the innocent and distressed salute[d] the ears of the executive [governor] in vain.”⁷⁴² The *Investigator* concluded its combination of exchange pieces with the words of a nonextant *Mohawk Liberal* that recited some of the claims against the Mormons and then queried:

⁷⁴¹ “WAR!— ‘War to the Knife’s Blade!’,” *Boston Investigator*, December 13, 1833; capitalization, punctuation, and emphases in original.

⁷⁴² “WAR!— ‘War to the Knife’s Blade!’”

Suppose [the charges] to be true in every particular, is the course pursued against them a proper one? Must they be attacked in the dead of midnight, after the manner of the savage, and turned from their homes,—men, women, children, and all, and then be refused redress by the officers of the law? It seems that it has been so. But we rejoice to say, that the only law left to them was appealed to with success. They met their savage foes with a holier spirit than we supposed they possessed, and dealt out the cold lead manfully, like men fighting as they were, for their homes, their religion, and their all!⁷⁴³

The sympathetic tone frequently included exasperation that proponents of natural and Constitutional freedoms so blatantly trampled them.

Some articles contained elements of multiple tones. When such texts were encountered, proportions determined the categorization. For example, in the rare case an article possessed equal instances of positive and negative tones it was coded as neutral. Nevertheless, the majority of articles contained proportionally disparate or exclusive tones.

The creation of these four tones mirrors the complex and remarkable attitudinal indices created by Jan Shipps for her study of Mormons in the media from 1860 to 1960.⁷⁴⁴ The much larger number of sources in this study necessitated a simpler coding process and did not require the deep nuances examined in Shipps's smaller number of samples. The four tones and coding qualifications described in this appendix were used without difficulty for the texts in this dissertation. Editors' choice of words and repetition of like vocabulary revealed the tone quite early in each article and reaffirmed it throughout the column.

⁷⁴³ "WAR!— 'War to the Knife's Blade!'"

⁷⁴⁴ See Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons*, chap. 2. The chapter and study are titled, "From Satyr to Saint: American Perceptions of the Mormons, 1860-1960."

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